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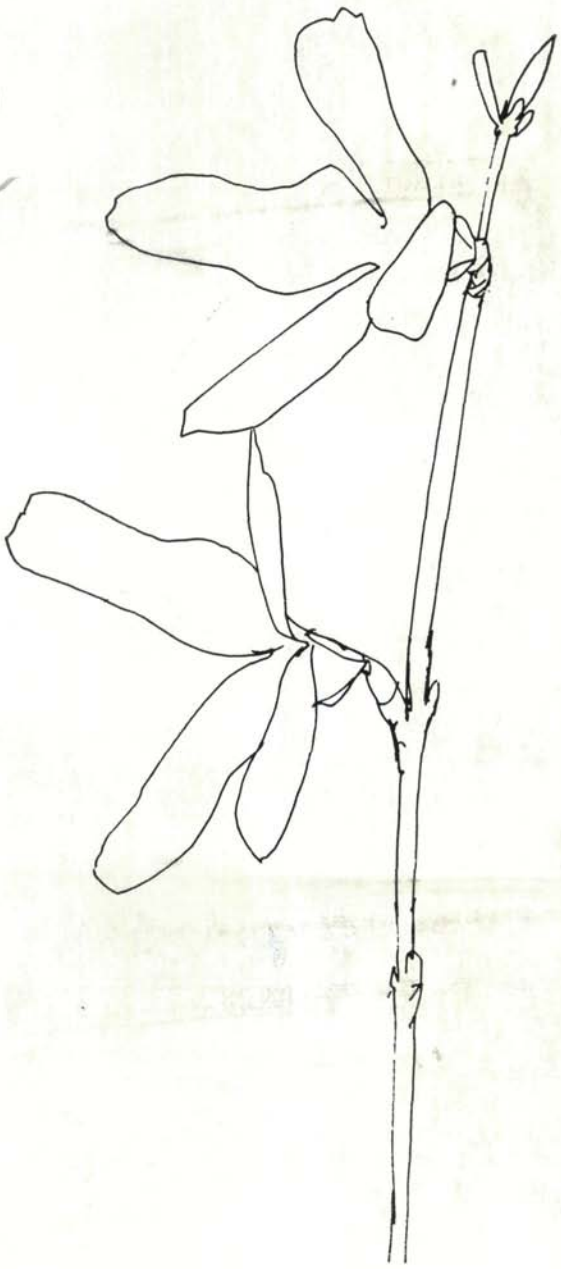

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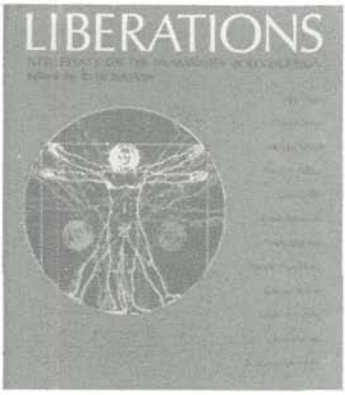

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#1, 1972 VOLUME XXXIX, NUMBER 1

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NOTES

LARRY NEAL is coeditor of **Black Fire** with LeRoi Jones. Mr. Neal is currently working on a book on black culture in the sixties. . . . **FRANK MANLEY** teaches Renaissance at Emory. Mr. Manley's hobby is Southeastern archaeology. . . . **ANNE HUSSEY** has three small children and is studying with Elizabeth Bishop at Harvard. . . . New Directions brought out **HAYDEN CARRUTH's** latest book of poetry, **For You.** At present, Mr. Carruth tells us, he's "working on a study of Rowland E. Robinson, a 19th-century Vermont author — of no general interest." . . . **"How the Plains Indians Got Horses"** is from **Giraffe, STANLEY PLUMLY's** second collection of poems, which will be finished this summer. Louisiana State University Press put out his first book, **In the Outer Dark.** . . . **GEORGE LEVINE** is spending the year in London, "writing," he says, "an irrelevant book about the novel and thinking about relevance." . . . **"Fireworks!"** is from **Paper Highway, ED LEFFINGWELL's** first novel. His second, **The Big Hotel,** was finished in October 1971. . . . **CHRISTINA STEAD** lives in Surrey and is "interested in all the things which have come into her life." . . . **JANE MAYHALL** is working on a book about American women writers for Macmillan. . . . Bobbs-Merrill is bringing out **MARK MIRSKY's** third novel, **Down Blue Hill Avenue,** in the fall. . . . **JOYCE CAROL OATES** is also in London this year. . . . Oxford published **TOM EDWARDS's Imagination and Power** in November. . . . The University of California Press is bringing out **CALVIN BEDIENT's Architects of the Self,** a book on George Eliot, Lawrence and Forster, this winter.

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P.E.N. Emergency Fund

At the recent meeting welcoming Heinrich Böll, P.E.N.'s new International President, to the United States, there was a long discussion of the desperate plight of writers in Czechoslovakia and Greece. Mr. Böll strongly urged the American Center to support the silenced writers through the foundation that the Dutch Center has set up. Its full name is the Foundation P.E.N. Emergency Fund.

The German Center has given 10,000 Marks, about 3,000 dollars, to this foundation. The Dutch writers have raised 3,000 florins — another 3,000 dollars. The English P.E.N. has been equally generous. The American Center has thus far given $1,000, $750 of which was donated by our treasurer, Eliot Janeway.

We think we can and should do more. We recently received a letter from the chairman of the fund, in which he wrote about what he had learned firsthand from a visit to Czechoslovakia. "The books of more than sixty writers have been banned, they cannot publish new manuscripts, a number of them have succeeded in getting badly paid blue collar jobs. I shall be leaving again for that country in another few days, taking with me the rest of our bank balance."

Will you help? You can make your checks out to the American Center of P.E.N. and send to P.E.N. American Center, 156 Fifth Ave., New York City 10010. Your gift is then tax deductible. We will forward the money to the Foundation P.E.N. Emergency Fund.

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WINTER 72

The Cultural Crisis. George Levine's piece in this issue is one of the best — certainly one of the sanest — I've seen about the confused state of the "profession of literature," which includes both criticism and teaching. Even if he has no ready answers, Levine is still no worse off than the rest of us, and more honest than most. But there are some aspects of the situation he does not go into which I think might throw some light on our dilemma.

For one thing, as I've suggested before, teaching and critical thinking are not the same thing, though they do overlap, particularly today when so many critics also teach. As for the problem of what to teach and how it relates to students' lives, it has been with us for a long time, and has only been accentuated and dramatized recently by radical students and blacks who sloganized their dissatisfactions into the notion of relevance. Ever since the schools became instruments of mass education, both teacher and student have been caught in the confusion between professional, vocational and general education; and they have constantly shuttled between the most antiquated and the most newfangled ideas of the classroom. When the impressionable student and the academic teacher want to challenge the educational system, they usually turn to the most permissive theories of the moment.

Today the profession of literature in the schools is being questioned most aggressively by those under the influence of the "counterculture." But the counterculture, since it includes almost everything that sees itself as opposed to the "established" culture, has no definite shape or content, or any clear idea of what is living and what is dead in our attitudes to writing and teaching. Hence criticism from the side of the "counterculture" tends to polarize the schools by encouraging half-baked experiments and by stiffening the resistence of the academic diehards to any kind of change.

Nor is the idea of a counterculture new. In the past there have been several countercultures, whose features have been less blurred than the current all-inclusive version. The most distinctive was the modernist movement, and it was not so long ago that figures like Joyce, Eliot, Kafka constituted an avant-garde, in opposition to the standard literary diet of the schools and the popular media. And because it had a unique sensibility and sense of direction — because it was not just vaguely dissident — this was a counterculture that was able to change the course of modern writing. Then, too, the university generated a kind of counterculture, arising from an academic, detached pursuit of knowledge in various disciplines. Its effect, obviously, was to create certain ideals of method and scholarship. And, more broadly, the various phases of the radical movement in the past, much like the

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general rebelliousness now, promoted a political counterculture by challenging the prevailing assumptions about life and art.

But a major difference between the past and the present is that in the past a live body of criticism existed, which succeeded, in literature at least, in mediating between conflicting cultural claims and goals. Today, however, one is struck by how little informed and engaged critical writing there is. The older critics are thinning out, and the younger ones, who can be counted on the fingers of one hand, feel like relics of a dying breed. There are obviously many reasons for this scarcity of critics, but I suspect one of the main causes is the widespread belief in cultural discontinuity. Up to now, each literary generation, each new movement, spawned a number of young critics able to spread the new views and generalize the change of sensibility without creating a feeling of utter chaos and incompatibility between the old and the new culture. The cause of modernism, for instance, was advanced by connecting it with the more vital strains of the past. T. S. Eliot's organic idea of literary development and Harold Rosenberg's tradition of the new, to take two very different examples, typified the assumption of continuity shared by radicals and conservatives. At present, however, what appears to make the contemporary period of transition so desperate, so frightening, so chaotic is the insistence on both sides of an abyss between the past and the present. No wonder the "profession of literature" seems so archaic and remote from the life of literature.

It may be that the idea of continuity is a myth that bolsters the forces of conservatism. But it does lie behind all our thinking. And without the principle of continuity it seems to me impossible to organize either our sense of history or our experience. After all, even so apocalyptic a thinker as Marx made the idea of socialism plausible by arguing that it was inevitable. Practical revolutionaries have always appealed to the logic of history.

Israel: A Cause without Rebels. I had resolved not to rush into print with my interpretations of life in Israel, after visiting it recently for the first time, exercising, as it were, the right of "temporary" return. For I never understood how some journalists could write with such facility and assurance about a country they had just popped into. Still, there are some observations I'd like to make without losing my amateur standing.

I am not the first to note that Israel is not only held together by its spirit and promise but also torn apart by contradictions. Everyone can see the miraculous accomplishments, the boastful national pride, the tribal energy, the messianic leadership. One feels one is witnessing the growth of a nation, compressed in time. But the contradictions are even more striking, for they lie at the heart of the achievements as well as the difficulties, and they cut into the question of one's identity and allegiances.

One's first impression is that of glaring contrasts: a tiny country with overgrown hopes; socialist communities within a capitalist society; a western civilization in an eastern setting; a state of siege psychology

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and a confident, bustling, almost relaxed daily life; a feeling that the Israeli-Arab conflict is insoluble along with a faith that it will be solved; the Jewish luftmench side by side with the Israeli technocrat — sometimes in the same person; a majority with the soul of a minority. And there is the ever present tension between ultimate ideals and what is thought to be possible now. The picture that sticks in one's mind is one of old monuments and new cities. It is all a montage of Jewish memories and Israeli dreams engraved on an ancient landscape of bald, chalk brown hills and corrugated valleys, like some prehistoric, science–fiction movie set.

But beneath these oppositions, kept from exploding by the needs of survival and the unifying idea of the homeland, there is a deeper contradiction, that of the nationalism of an international people. I often had the feeling in Israel that it is as though the intellectuals of the world decided to form a state of their own in some legendary and primitive land, with nothing to lose except their roots. When you talk to someone in Israel you feel you are talking at the same time to the speculative, skeptical mind of a European intellectual and the purposive, empirical mind of a frontiersman. This is why so many Israelis, including the leaders, are both tough and full of moral qualms about the Arabs. And this is one reason why the Left in America and Europe is able to sympathize with the backward and demagogic nationalism of the Arabs, yet is suspicious of the much more candid nationalism of the Israelis, who are thought of as a western people poaching on alien soil.

Most striking is the almost total absence of dissidence on the Left, even among the most sophisticated, internationally oriented intellectuals and students. Unlike the Left here, the most radical Israelis think of Israel as their country and fighting for it as self-defense. And I must say that while this identification with one's own nation deprives one of the feeling of purity and alienation many radicals enjoy, I found it quite instructive and appealing. For to connect only with an international idea and cut oneself off from any national ties leaves one totally uprooted.

All these tensions were remarkably personified in a gifted young writer, Amos Oz, whom I went to see at the kibbutz where he lives and works. He is a most impressive figure, who in his self-consciousness, his anguish, his resignation is a modern writer, but whose experience is that of a pioneer. As he talked about what it does to you to live all your life in a "state of siege," and how hard it was to hold on to your faith in the brotherhood of man while fighting off daily Arab raids — as he explained what an Israeli was, I began to understand what so many Israelis meant when they said the conflict with the Arabs could be settled only in time, not in theory. And I couldn't help thinking, enviously, that Americans are forced to experience history vicariously, that we relive the extreme situations of other peoples — which probably accounts for our abstract and moralizing approach to politics.

W. P.

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Richard Poirier

THE MINORITY WITHIN

Since about 1957 and "The White Negro," Norman Mailer has come to associate creativity and the imagination with the assertion of a minority position, and his contempt for liberals is a consequence of his conviction that they would deprive us of the vicissitudes and oppositions which are the necessary conditions for art and for any full sense of life. In "The Tenth Presidential Paper" he claims that

> Minority groups are the artistic nerves of the republic, and like any phenomenon which has to do with art, they are profoundly divided. They are both themselves and the mirror of their culture as it reacts upon them. They are themselves and the negative truth of themselves. No white man, for example, can hate the Negro race with the same passionate hatred that each Negro feels for himself and for his people; no anti-Semite can begin to comprehend the malicious analysis of his soul which every Jew indulges every day.

Still later, in "A Speech at Berkeley on Vietnam Day," he proposes that anyone in America, even the President, is "a member of a minority group if he contains two opposed notions of himself at the same time." He asserts that

> What characterizes the sensation of being a member of a minority group is that one's emotions are forever locked in the chains of ambivalence — the expression of an emotion forever releasing its opposite — the ego in perpetual transit from the tower to the dungeon and back again. By this definition nearly everyone in America is a member of a minority group, alienated from the self by a

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> double sense of identity and so at the mercy of a self which demands action and more action to define the most rudimentary borders of identity.

Such a passage, and the preceding one in which he claims that minorities "are both themselves and the mirror of their culture" indicate why Mailer is a more difficult writer in a book like *An American Dream* or in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* than most critics or reviewers are prepared to recognize. Not everyone is qualified for the kind of reading, the reading as much with the ear as with the eye, that his writing calls for; not everyone is capable of caring for the drama of his argument and of his language, as it plays across the page; and very few are prepared for his unique mixtures of the world of daily news, the world we take for granted, with the world of nightmare and psychotic imagining. He is quite unlike any other writer of his generation. He is more like Pynchon than, say, like Burroughs or Borges with whom he has similarities enough to make the differences instructive. Burroughs is interested in showing how the world of the underground is a metaphor for the world we all live in, while Mailer insists on the fact that the world we live in *is* the underground. And Borges, for all his marvelous facility and wit, becomes, after any extended reading, tedious and emasculating. He is forever demonstrating the fictive nature of reality, forever calling us away from the dangers of contemporary facts, Argentinian or otherwise, to the refuge of fabling and the titillation of literary bewilderment. Burroughs is a writer of genius equivalent to Mailer's and essential to the latter's development, especially in *Why Are We in Vietnam?,* but the currently touted Borges is the kind of writer whose relation to the possibilities of literature is like the relation of a good cookbook to food.

Mailer insists on living *at* the divide, living *on* the divide, between the world of recorded reality and a world of omens, spirits and powers, only that his presence there may blur the distinction. He seals and obliterates the gap he finds, like a sacrificial warrior. This fusion in the self of conflicting realms makes him a disturbing, a difficult and an important writer. I use these terms deliberately, to suggest that his willingness to remain locked into "the chains of ambivalence" is a measure of the dimension and immediacy of his concerns, of his willingness not to foreclose on his material in the

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interests of merely formal resolutions. There is no satisfactory form for his imagination when it is most alive. There are only exercises for it. Of course any particular exercise can, in the long run, become equivalent to a form, and when that happens Mailer is least interesting to himself or to us, as in those parts in *Of a Fire on the Moon* that boringly reduce everything to favorite categories, or in some of his extended demonstrations of what a smart boy he can be in his self-interviews.

Why Are We in Vietnam? and *The Armies of the Night,* along with parts of *Advertisements for Myself* and *An American Dream* put Mailer easily in the company, it seems to me, of Fitzgerald and Hemingway, conceivably of Faulkner. His accomplishment deserves comparison with theirs precisely because it is of a different kind and because it takes account of the varieties, evolutions, discontinuities and accumulations of style since World War II. He could not be to our time what they were to theirs without being in many important respects radically unlike them in the way he writes. No other American writer of this period has tried so resolutely and so successfully to account for the eclecticisms of contemporary life when it comes to ideas of form, of language, of culture, of political and social structures and of the self.

The reason why most thoughtful and literate young readers prefer Mailer to, say, Updike or Roth or Malamud is that his timing is synchronized to theirs, while the others move to an older beat. Which is to say something not only about Mailer's taste for certain situations but also about a taste for Mailer, for the pace and movement of his writing. I suspect that an enthusiasm for his work means that one shares his partiality for those moments where more is happening than one can very easily assimilate. By and large the other contemporary writers I've mentioned will not allow more to happen than can be accounted for in the forms they have settled upon. They work away from rather than into the ultimate inconsistencies, the central incoherence in the way we live now. Mailer, on the other hand, is always looking for the stylistic equivalent for that movement of "the ego in perpetual transit from tower to dungeon and back again." It is no accident that *An American Dream,* which incidentally seems to move rather frequently between the Waldorf Towers and police headquarters, finds its most appreciative audience

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among serious young students of literature who have a surer instinct for what it offers than have most of Mailer's critics. The always outmoded criteria of verisimilitude, the accusations that the characterization of Rojack is the occasion merely for a vulgar ego trip by Mailer, the charge that the book is simply dirty and that it fails for not making the hero pay for the crime of murder — these accusations sound primitive enough for hill-country journalism of a bygone era, but they happen to have been sponsored by, among others, Philip Rahv, Elizabeth Hardwick and Tom Wolfe, who complains of "unreal dialogue" as if there is such a thing as "real" dialogue. Even to evoke criteria of this kind betrays an inability to see what such a book is about, and I mention these criticisms only because they represent the persistence of standards — and there are of course many young pseudoneoclassicists coming through the ranks — which continue to keep discussions of Mailer at an irrelevant and demeaning level even when some sympathetic critics set about to defend him.

Oddly enough, it is just because it does call for the kind of negative response it has mostly gotten that *An American Dream* is such a brilliant achievement. From the first sentence the novel lays a proprietary claim on the so-called real world, and even Tom Wolfe ought to have found the dialogue of the police or a Mafia don, like Gannuchi, "real" enough. Within a couple of paragraphs we learn that Rojack went to Harvard (so did Mailer); that Rojack met Kennedy (Mailer did, too, though under quite different circumstances); that Rojack ran for Congress and won (while Mailer's first effort to run for Mayor of New York had already floundered); that Rojack killed his wife (Mailer had recently stabbed his second). Both were for a time held by the police; they are roughly the same age, Rojack 44 and Mailer at the time of writing, 41; Rojack is half and Mailer all Jewish; and both pursue the same topic — as writers and television personalities — namely that "magic, dread, and the perception of death were the roots of motivation."

This mixture of history and fiction, of the author's with the hero's biography, of Melvillian metaphysical rhetoric with social talk as vividly "authentic" as any in Philip Roth or in the best of the detective fiction which Mailer sometimes imitates, the adhesion of interior fantasizing to moments of strenuously cool public etiquette — these are frequent enough in literature to have become nearly the

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trademark of a special, usually large thematic ambition. What is remarkable in *An American Dream* is the extravagance of Mailer's rendition of each of these modes; there is the clear indication that if he so chose he could write any kind of novel that literature has made available to us.

What he wants to do, however, is something more daring. He wants to show that the world of the demonic, the supernatural, the mad is not simply the reverse side of the world that sets the normal standards by which these other conditions are defined as abnormal. Instead he wants to suggest that these worlds are simultaneous, coextensive. Perhaps he would have escaped the strictures visited upon him had he set the novel in Los Angeles, which most literary critics have long since agreed is a city where anything they know about can become anything they don't know about and certainly everything they disapprove of. He chose istead the difficult locale of New York which, as late as 1965, passed for sane, even for fun city.

Rojack resembles Mailer but is not to be confused with him. The difference essentially is that he is only in the process of achieving that level of integration between madness and sanity at which Mailer had to arrive as the precondition of his writing the book at all. In wanting to escape madness Rojack decides he must position himself at some false divide between the world of merely seeming sanity — the party he attends at the beginning, his encounters with the police, his recollected involvements with historical issues, his talk with various recognizable types in the bars and at the apartment of his father-in-law, Kelly — and the world of nightmare and death with which he flirts. He lives at the divide of two kinds of equally unacceptable power: of demonic social and economic systems and of demonic imaginations of himself as a kind of *Ubermensch*. He thus exists on the borders of identity, suicidally placed at different times in the book on the parapet of a balcony high above Manhattan with the moon and the abyss on one side and, on the other, the realities and blandishments of a deadening academic-literary–intellectual-social commitment. In his verbal as well as in his physical excursions between these two worlds, Rojack moves in obedience to a map already charted in Mailer's earlier works, a diagram of the formative working of Mailer's imagination.

Rojack raises a most interesting question about Mailer. Even to arrive at that question, consider, first of all, that Rojack's ef-

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forts at self-creation in language are analagous to his efforts in action in that both are an attempt to discover the shape of his true self by daring each side of the divide on which he chooses to live. Consider further that his verbal transits between worlds are equivalent to Mailer's own movements up and down between the linked oppositions which hold so much of his work and of his world together. The question, then, is this: what does Rojack's condition, once he has escaped from this "perpetual transit," tell us about the kinds of fulfillment that Mailer wishes to arrive at as a writer? In order to be a writer at all, in order quite literally to write, it is perhaps necessary that he remain the embattled embodiment of the two worlds from which, in the hope of becoming a new man, in the hope of having a second birth, Rojack wants desperately to escape. Rojack wants to escape from the world as it is contrived and structured by conspiracies of power.

What is not sufficiently clarified even by admirers of *An American Dream* — and I am thinking of two astute critics, Leo Bersani and Tony Tanner — is that Rojack really hopes to do more than that. He would also like to escape from his own, which is to say from Mailer's counterconspiracies, his alternative but often insane inventions. Above all, he would be "free of magic," not only the "magic at the top," that cluster of the incorporated social-economic-political power which Kelly seems to offer him as a bribe, but also the magic he evokes in order not to be tempted by the bribe. He wants to be free of the enslavement to system which is implicit in the total absorption of his opposition to system. Stepping out of the dialectical frame so nearly compulsive in Mailer, Rojack is allowed to say that he would like to escape "the tongue of the Devil, the dread of the Lord, I wanted to be some sort of rational man again, nailed tight to details, promiscuous, reasonable, blind to the reach of the seas." His prayer simply is that he be allowed to "love that girl, and become a father, and try to be a good man, and do some decent work." At last, with admiration, almost with relief, the reader can welcome back that modest, nice, young Jewish boy in Mailer who won't ever, quite, let himself be forgotten. So that if Rojack passes over a terrain already thoroughly explored by his creator, he reveals the otherwise scarcely articulated wish of his creator to arrive back home where it all begins.

Mailer's articulate brilliance depends on his not succeeding as

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a writer in a way Rojack proposes to succeed as a man, which is perhaps why Rojack cannot be allowed any palpable equivalence to his language of love, to the nearly hippie simplicity with which he would replace his Hip embattlement. Rojack's feeling of possible mutation, as if "I had crossed a chasm of time and was some new breed of man," which occurs fairly early in the book, has only a grotesque realization at the end when, in Las Vegas to gamble for his trip onward alone to Guatemala and Yucatan — striking out like the classic American hero to the territory always beyond — he says that "Nobody knew that the deserts of the West, the arid empty wild blind deserts, were producing again a new breed of man." However "new," this breed is, like the old one, suspended between two worlds: the one a horror of nature, "the bellows of the desert," the other of technology, the air-conditioned hotel where he spends twenty-three of every twenty-four hours as if "in a pleasure chamber of an encampment on the moon." The movement from the desert of this book to the icy North range of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and then to the magnificently described craters of the moon in *Of a Fire on the Moon* may be Mailer's way of suggesting that because we have denuded and corrupted nature in those parts of our world where it might be hospitable, we are perforce engaging ourselves, by an urgency of the will akin to Sgt. Croft's assault on Mt. Anaka, with those sanctuaries of nature which are least hospitable. And there we absorb the savagery and the urge to kill which is part of nature, while at the same time we accept the protections afforded by a wholly technological atmosphere unnatural to the environment in which it has been placed. Mailer thus proposes an insoluble paradox: that human savagery increases in direct proportion to our monumental achievements in those realms of technology which now imperially reach into the very last recesses of nature.

Mailer has come to posit situations in which the imaginable alternatives seem to be suicide or "a slow death by conformity, with every creative and rebellious instinct stifled" [*Advertisements for Myself*]. The question being asked in all his books from *An American Dream* to the present is, for him, steadfastly grim: Am I, Norman Mailer, at last an expendable human type, and is the "ability to create art" (which, again, ought not to be confused with the ability to absorb

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it or revere it as Culture) finally not simply irrelevant but perhaps actually a quixotic imposition that further exhausts the spirit of the writer and reader alike? Hints of exhaustion are evident, I fear, in *Of a Fire on the Moon* and *The Prisoner of Sex*. In these, more simply than in any other of his recent work, Mailer seems, in a crochety and sentimental, an aggressively petulant and self-pitying way, to encamp himself as a Defender of the Imagination in an Age of Technology. Perhaps this explains why some of the best parts of both books are about other artists and writers, other "defenders" of the faith, as in the exquisite discussions of Cezanne and Magritte in the moon book.

Where he has faced the question of creative impotence less explicitly, where he seems rather to get entangled with it against his will, he displays something even more profitable to his writing than are his admirations for other artists, however much they reassure him that it is still possible, in Empson's phrase, to learn a style from a despair. I am referring to the passionate energy with which he displays his mastery, perhaps unequalled since the parodic brilliance of Joyce in *Ulysses,* of those expressive modes which threaten to obliterate his own expression, those contemporary styles that provide us too abundantly with images of what we possibly are in our public and in our private selves. And he can do this while simultaneously demonstrating the greater inventiveness, inclusiveness, plasticity and range of his own modes. Nowhere is this more impressively evident than in the most dazzling and perhaps the most incomprehensibly slighted of his novels, *Why Are We in Vietnam?*

The novel's answer to the question raised in its title fits none of the schemes of cause and effect that dominate nearly all "responsible" social and political thinking. And "responsible" it has proved to be — for the war. Vietnam is mentioned once, and then only in the last sentence. Instead Mailer is attempting, with a vitality akin to the Circe episode in *Ulysses,* to register the fevered mentality of which this atrocity is not so much a consequence as a part. So naturally a part, that no one in the book needs consciously to be aware of the existence of Vietnam as in any way unique. It is not especially worth mentioning. We are in Vietnam because we are as we corporately are. We are all of one another. And for that reason Mailer makes the voices that speak to us in the book, in the various

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Intro Beeps and Chaps into which it is divided, a matter of serious but comic bewilderment. Perhaps, as it mostly seems, what we get are emissions from the hopped-up mind of D.J., a Dallas late adolescent son of corporation millionaire Rusty and of his wife Hallie Lee Jethroe. We can't be sure. In this work D.J. functions as Mailer has done in others: as the theorist of multiple identity. He cautions us that

> we have no material physical site or locus for this record, because I can be in the act of writing it, recording it, slipping it (all unwitting to myself) into the transistorized electronic aisles and microfilm of the electronic Lord (who, if he is located in the asshole, must be Satan) or I can be an expiring consciousness, I can be the unwinding and unravelings of a nervous constellation just now executed, killed, severed or stopped, maybe even stunned, you thunders, Herman Melville go hump Moby and wash his Dick. Or maybe I am like a Spade and writing like a Shade.

The "voice" here is a composite of styles, tones and allusions transposed to the pace of a disc jockey's taped talk. Throughout the book this voice manages to incorporate nearly every kind of cant one can hear on the airways of America. To a lesser degree Rojack was also an assemblage of parts, some of them disjunctive with others. The often abrupt but deftly managed shifts of his style are one indication of this. (So, too, with Cherry. Watching her sing under the spotlight in a nightclub, Rojack imagines that "she could have been a nest of separate personalities," a nice formula for his own and for Mailer's willing if more warlike gathering of disparate selves.)

Mailer's healthy and at last dogged refusal to put together a self at the cost of stifling any fragment of his personality enters into what can be called his willingness to decharacterize the people he likes. While giving full expression to the social and psychological identities which could be conventionally assigned to such characters, he proposes at the same time that they are impersonal units of energy, connected to powers quite unlike those which can account for the character in his other, more normal existence. This is why Mailer's heroes and heroines, especially in *An American Dream,* are a kind of battleground where external forces which inhabit the soul or the psyche war for possession. While Mailer admires the strength in a person like Rojack or Cherry that allows such a war even to go on, he also shares the terror they necessarily feel. In *An American*

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Dream and still more in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is the acknowledgment that perhaps it is impossible to fashion any self which one can call one's own. Perhaps — and here the increasing influence of Burroughs on the later Mailer is apparent — we are no more than interchangeable, tooled parts of one another. D.J. is all he says he is and more, while American literature in the person of Herman Melville offers, at one point, a convenient scenario for the hunt in Alaska and, at another, the occasion only for a smartass joke.

D.J. is a character some of the time — a wild, brilliant, witty, savage, eager and not unappealing boy; but he is much more than a character. He is the place, the context, the locus for an American mixture which is finally committed to the kill, and Melville is but one ingredient in the whipped-up, heated and soured mixture. The war already existed in that complex of pressures which shaped the character of the nation and thus its fate, the "subtle oppression," as he describes it in *The Armies of the Night,* "which had come to America out of the very air of the century (this evil twentieth century with its curse on the species, its oppressive Faustian lusts, its technological excrement all over the conduits of nature, its entrapment of the innocence of the best)." Vietnam, that is, did not induce this novel, but was itself induced by what the novel manages to gather up and redefine from everything Mailer had been saying for fifteen years or more about his country. And what he has to say about America is more than usually dependent upon what American literature has been saying for some 150 years. At a pace that is likely to overwhelm many readers, Mailer demonstrates his stylistic capacity to match the tempo of historical accelerations toward disaster. But he had already described that movement in the quieter tones of earlier work. It is consistent with what the novel is saying that he should have said much of it before — that it was there to be noted — in other less compelling forms. As early as 1959 he offered a kind of prediction of the novel in "From Surplus Value to Mass Media," an essay which he calls "one of the most important short pieces" in *Advertisements for Myself.* He proposed that if any new revolutionary vision of society is to be "captured by any of us in work or works," the necessary exploration will go

> not nearly so far into that jungle of political economy which Marx charted and so opened to rapid development, but rather will engage

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> the empty words, dead themes, and sentimental voids of that mass media whose internal contradictions twist and quarter us between the lust of the economy (which radiates a greed to consume into us, with sex as the invisible salesman) and the guilt of the economy which must chill us with authority, charities for cancer, and all reminder that the mass consumer is only on drunken furlough from the ordering disciplines of church, F.B.I., and war.

This passage proves particularly apt to *Why Are We in Vietnam?* The style of the novel is mimetic of the arts of the absurd he finds so chilling in a prefatory note in *Cannibals and Christians,* "Our Argument Fully Resumed." He there contrasts the art of self–expression (for which he offers the quite peculiarly inappropriate examples of Joyce and Picasso) which came out of the nineteenth century of iron frustration, with the arts which evolved after World War II, when children "grew up not on frustration but interruption." This later art is designed to shatter the nerves with "style, with wit, each explosion a guide to building a new nervous system." Dealing with "categories and hierarchies of discontinuity and the style of their breaks," it goes out to "hustle fifty themes in an hour." It is an art which mass produces the wastes of art, though he doesn't quite get around to being that explicit about it. As usual, he is not anxious to appear a defender of high culture even when his own logic directs him that way.

Why Are We in Vietnam? is a medley of "empty words" and "dead themes," and Mailer would appear to suggest that these are really the inventions of the mass media. In fact, they represent what the mass media has made out of high culture, of psychoanalysis, of literary criticism, of myth and even of Mailer's own favorite theological evocations, such as "dread." What lays waste to the human mind is a central subject of this novel. But that is to put the matter rather too simply. Still more important in understanding its rapid shifts of style is Mailer's preoccupation with the processes by which the mind is encouraged to turn its own contents, turn itself even, into waste. This is a necessarily complicated process. It is dramatized in this novel by a remarkable combination of quick changes and constant repetitions. We find ourselves transported with almost maddening speed from one context to another even while we are forced to absorb along the way an insistent recurrence of phrases, names, allusions, actions, tones of voice. In other words, the constant interruptions which

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create such a variety of contexts and moods in the book make its structure analogous to the structure, as Mailer has defined it, of contemporary daily life. Whether digested or not, one momentary accumulation of meaning has to be flushed out to make room for the rapid infusion of the next. No word, no name, no allusion, no idea can rest for even a moment in the mood which it is supposed to secure, and so the book proliferates in interruptions which involve the splitting even of titles, like "Moby" and "Dick," and in puns that mock the very authority which licenses them: "But rest for the inst," D.J. tells the reader. The phrase creates a paradox by calling for a rest in a contraction so hurried as to suggest there can be none, and then continues — "Return to civ, which is to say syphilization and fuck James Joyce."

There is no consciousness in the book wherein the reader is allowed to find any security, which is again a reminder of Joyce's *Ulysses* and of the disturbance felt by critics whenever they are confronted with this kind of phenomenon. Their tendency is then to invent now one, now another schematization in which to garage their minds. Efforts to locate some source of authority in Mailer's novels reveal only that there is none. This is as it must be, since his intent is to refer us to determinants in American life which are mysterious and unlocatable, and the more powerful for being so. The question addressed by the book is no longer the Marxist one of the exploitation of working time or even of the human sense of time by the profit motive. Rather, the question is the domination of pleasure and of inner time. Remember that in "From Surplus Value to Mass Media," Mailer takes the Marcusean view, without the Marcusean heaviness, that we are "only on drunken furlough from the ordering disciplines of church, F.B.I., and war." The appropriateness of these terms to the novel is evident: the two boys are, in effect, on furlough from the war, the book being a record of what presumably is passing through the head of D.J. as he and Tex sit at their farewell dinner in Dallas. More than that, no one in the novel is ever seen at work, except possibly Hallie's psychoanalyst, Leonard Levin Ficthe Rothenberg, alternately called Linnit Live'n Fixit Rottenbug or Dr. Fink Lenin Rodzianko. It can be said that the book is given wholly to interruptions and distractions, though there is no telling from what, unless it be the urge to kill or hump. This is true even for that part

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of the hunt in Alaska which is called a "purification ceremony" for the boys.

In a book so pointedly evasive about assigning responsibility for its voices, its shifts and modulations, it is all the more curious that the section in which this "rite" occurs gives evidence of a more total engagement of Mailer's genius than can be found in any other of his works except for *The Armies of the Night,* written in the next year. The section, from Chap 8 to the end, making up nearly half the book, covers some of the Alaskan safari organized by Rusty Jethroe for the Medium Assholes, as D.J. calls them, of his corporation — Rusty himself being a High Asshole — D.J., Tex and the guide Big Luke Fellinka, and it includes all the episodes in which the boys separate themselves from the other hunters, leave their weapons behind and head north into the icy peaks of the Brooks Range. Their quite conscious ambition is to "get the fear, shit, disgust and mixed shit tapeworm out of fucked up guts and overcharged nerves" and to cleanse themselves of the "specific mix of mixed old shit" represented by the talk and the tactics of their companions. These latter, though overarmed and assisted by a helicopter in their search for bear, still have to lie about their credit for the kill, as does D.J.'s father at the expense of his son. They are, as Tony Tanner points out in *The House of Words,* which includes one of the best essays written about Mailer, going "as far into the northern snow as they can, not to kill but to open themselves up to the mystery and dread of this geographical extreme." Tanner connects this not only to Rojack's position on the parapet but to Mailer's position as a writer who tries "to keep an equilibrium on the 'dangerous edge of things' through the resources of his own style."

This is of course a position not unfamiliar to American writers, and especially to Melville. There are Melvillian touches from the beginning of his work, as in the notation that Lt. Hearn in *The Naked and the Dead* wrote his college honors thesis on Melville; he is an appropriately felt presence throughout Mailer's accounts of the voyage to the moon; and the character of Rojack has interesting similarities to Ahab. Both men are convinced of the presence of what Ahab calls "malicious agencies," both have been mutilated by them, both are demonic and opposed to demons, both make use of the mechanisms of capitalistic culture in an effort to reach a reality

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which that culture has not yet been able to assimilate, both are at once charismatic and repellent, both share a peculiar, manic belief in their powers to exhale influences on others — Rojack by shooting his psychic pellets at obnoxious people in a New York bar, and Ahab in his claims, at one point, that "something shot from my dilated nostrils has inhaled it in his lungs, Starbuck now is mine" — and both have a longing for the ordinary life which is denied them by the very nature of their heroic exertions. Above all, neither imagines that if nature is some alternative to society it is necessarily a benign one. Rojack does not assume that the craters of the moon are hospitable, and Mailer, gazing at moon rock, feels an affection that is also spooky. In Mailer's work, as far back as his first novel, man in nature is what Lawrence said Deerslayer truly proved to be: "isolate and a killer." In *Why Are We in Vietnam?* what is finally bequeathed by the presiding spirit of the North is the order to go forth and kill.

The important issue is not the identification, not even the uses made of other writers in a book like this, be they Melville or Faulkner or Lawrence. What should concern us, rather, is the necessity to bother with literature at all, within a complex of competing, equally urgent or equally innocuous references. This novel tends to remind us of literature, to remind us that it is literature we are reading. But the literature which gets to us in this book has passed through other media which rend and shred it. Appropriately we are made to think of the diminishing claims of literature, its problematic existence in a book where all forms of expression and of consciousness are made problematic. The references to Melville and the "Dick" of "Moby" are on the same page as are other equally possible and proposed models for the narrative voice: movie-cutie George Hamilton, or a choice proposed in saying that "I'm coming on like Holden Caulfield when I'm really Dr. Jekyll with balls."

What I mean to suggest is that the trip by the boys alone into the wilderness, their trip to the "edge," is not quite in the same category as Rojack's imaginary and real extensions of his own power into equally perilous circumstances. Mailer's account of the trip reveals, more than does anything in his other books, a willingness to gamble imaginatively up to the limits of his own resources. The trip by the boys is made into an existential experience. But who could doubt that it would be? What's more interesting is that it is also, and

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emphatically, a literary one, with admixtures of film idols, fashionable intellectual guides like Marshall McLuhan, crossings of Shakespeare with Batman, of Katherine Anne Porter with Clare Booth Luce. I don't mean that such a cheery and utilitarian treatment of literature is designed merely to characterize the boys and elicit our sad and amused contempt. Actually, the boys are made as bright as any potential reader, certainly as bright as most literary-academic ones. (After all, D.J. has ready access to his "Literary Handbook Metaphor Manual.") Their literary self-consciousness, combined with their intellectual savvy, is what enriches the episode of their excursion beyond anything like it in American literature since *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* an earlier book "written" by an adolescent who, though he tried to avoid the "style" of his times as energetically as D.J. tries to imitate his, was nonetheless also its victim.

While D.J. and Tex can be compared respectively to Huck and Tom, they are both more like Tom to the degree that they eagerly subscribe to system, to doing things "by the book," though now "the book" encompasses film, TV and disc jockeys. So much so that in important respects they do not exist as characters at all but as expressive filaments of some computerized mind. This is made especially important, for any understanding of what Mailer is up to, by the sudden attention given in Chap 10 to the phrase "purification ceremony."

> They have not cleaned the pipes, not yet. They are still full of toilet plunger holes seen in caribou, and shattered guts and strewn-out souls of slaughtered game meats all over the Alaska air and Tex feels like he's never going to hunt again which is not unhorrendous for him since he's natural hunter, but then with one lightning leap from the button on his genius belt to the base of his brain-pan he gets the purification ceremony straight in his head, and announces to D.J. that they gonna wrap their weapons and lash them in a tree. . . .

Clearly the "ceremony" is something out of the "Literary Handbook Metaphor Manual," electronically banked and awaiting the proper signal. Just as obviously the phrase is meant to trigger in the reader's mind some recollection of the "relinquishment" scene of Isaac McCaslin in Faulkner's *The Bear.* The difference is that in Mailer's book the "ceremony" is as much a literary-critical exercise as it is an existential act, at least insofar as D.J. chooses to recollect

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it. If "the purification ceremony" exists as something one can get "straight in his head," then this alone is symptomatic of how even the effort to free oneself of waste is construed in this book as an act that partakes of that waste, that belongs, like so much else, to cultural and literary cliché.

Nor are these corrosive implications extemporized for this specific occasion only. From nearly the beginning, the trek North by the boys has been treated as something predigested. Included in the report of the experience is the kind of literary interpretation usually left to the ingenuity of academic close reading. The zest for the adventure is equalled, probably excelled, by D.J.'s zest for the literary analysis of it, along with instructions on how, when and where to pay the needed kind of attention:

> . . . what they see is a range of mountains ahead with real peaks, and they are going to go on up into them. (Ice needle peaks are crystals to capture the messages of the world.)
>
> There! You all posed y'll ready for the next adventure in the heartland of the North, well hold your piss, Sis, we're about to embark with Tex Hyde who is, insist upon it, a most peculiar blendaroon of humanity and evil, technological know-how, pure savagery, sweet aching secret American youth, and sheer downright meanness as well as genius instincts for occult power (he's just the type to whip asses at the Black Masses) as well as being crack athlete. Such consummate bundle of high contradictions talks, naturally in a flat mean ass little voice. Better hear it.

Some measure of the brilliance of Mailer's achievement in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is that he makes us almost regret that it is such a funny book, among the comic masterpieces, I think, of American literature. It is a book that makes us yearn for what it disposes of in its jokes. It induces the wish that it were possible still to restore sincerity to the noble effort of a line of heroes stretching back from Faulkner to Emerson and Cooper: the trek to the "edge" of civilization, there to be cleansed of its contaminations.

In its honesty, however, the novel is even more pessimistic about such a gesture than is the interestingly related example of *St. Mawr.* Lawrence's landscape in that work is as savage and nonhuman in its beauty as is Mailer's. But while the literary pretension implicit in trying to take some encouragement from this landscape is sufficiently noted, the illusion that one can find there a clue to human transfor-

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mation is nonetheless treated with an at least grim elation. Lawrence is able to elude the ironies of the situation much more directly than Mailer can: he rather bluntly asserts that however ludicrous the form of self-cleansing may be in this particular instance, it can still represent some more general and laudable possibilities of reawakening and renewal. "Man has to rouse himself afresh," he editorializes, "to cleanse the new accumulations of refuse. To win from the crude wild nature the victory and the power to make another start, and to cleanse behind him the century-deep deposits of layer upon layer of refuse."

Lawrence is not at all reticent about using Lou Witt's naïveté as sufficient cause for a large exhortation about "man"; Mailer refuses to arrange any comparable license for himself. D.J. has been allowed effectively to claim that he is the spokesman (which also means victim) of the electrified "mind" that takes us to Vietnam. He represents the oversoul as Univac. Since Mailer's whole purpose is to lend authority to the claim that D.J. has incorporated the "mind" of an historical moment, he can't for that very reason promote an alternative voice capable of redemptive flourishes. He has already sacrificed to D.J.'s satirization the large rhetoric which Lawrence keeps as a privilege. All he can do is try to locate in D.J. some faint, some submerged minority life left behind, as it were, from the washed out wastes of the humanistic tradition.

Mailer pushes his luck in this novel about as far as a writer can. He creates a consciousness which is disarmingly bright, funny, weirdly attractive, if one thinks of it in terms of "character," while simultaneously making it a kind of computer bank in which is stored the fragmented consciousness of everyone else in the novel. In this role D.J. is not so much a character as the medium through which pass the hundreds of identifiable voices that circulate in the nation (and in our literature) and whose final message, ending the book, is "Vietnam, hot damn."

Except as we shall see for one crucial talent, Mailer surrenders nearly everything to the consciousness identified as D.J. He allows it to desiccate his sense of continuity with the literature of the past. He puts his own sincerities up for parody, as in D.J.'s reference to "the Awe-Dread Bombardment from Mr. Sender" and his marvelous contrast between "love" (which is "dialectic, man, back and forth,

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hate and sweet, leer-love, spit-tickle, bite-lick") and "corporation" (which is "DC, direct current, diehard charge, no dialectic man, just one-way street, they don't call it Washington, D.C. for nothing"). And he allows parody of himself, familiar enough in his self–interviews, to be joined to the parody of older literature, as when he refers to "shit," "Awe" and "Dread" as "that troika — that Cannibal Emperor of Nature's Psyche (this is D.J. being pontiferous, for we are contemplating emotion recollected in tranquillity back at the Dallas ass manse, RTPY — Remembrance Things Past, Yeah, you remember?"

This passage points to perhaps the most significant way in which D.J. usurps the place Mailer usually reserves for himself. D.J. is allowed to operate narratively in Mailer's own most effective mode, the one which tells us most about his peculiar relationship to the passage of time. Everything in the Chaps is reported from memory, no matter how much it seems of the present, except for the occasional notice given to the dinner party at which all the material issues from the mind of D.J. The Intro Beeps continually alert us to this: "Repeat, all you deficient heads out there and nascent electronic gropers, memory is the seed of narrative, yeah, and D.J. grassed out at a formal dinner in his momma daddy's Dallas house with Tex in white smoking jacket across the table has brought back gobs of Alaska hunt memory two years before," or, in another example (which includes an allusion, then comically misannotated, to the very pertinent "Le bateau ivre" of Rimbaud) he tells us that "form is more narrative, memory being always more narrative than the tohu-bohu of the present, which is Old Testament Hebrew, cock-sucker, for chaos and void." Memory, it might be recalled from "The Political Economy of Time," is the "mind's embodiment of form; therefore, memory, like the mind, is invariably more pure than the event. An event consists not only of forces which are opposed to one another but also forces which have no relation to the event. Whereas memory has a tendency to retain only the oppositions and the context" [*Cannibals and Christians*].

D.J.'s account, then, should not be taken as either full or accurate — assuming that an account possibly could be — any more than are the writings after the event in *The Armies of the Night* or *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* or Mailer's various collections of

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pieces. The importance of this fact to the book is that we are to mistrust the interpretation as much as the reporting of events. The parodistic phrase "purification ceremony" — a product of Tex's mind, if we are to believe D.J., after they have spontaneously set out on the trip — should not limit or even direct our reading of their motives for the trip or their activities on it. Since we cannot even be sure that the phrase occurred to Tex, we can't be sure that the boys were, at the time, actually aware of the literary analogues to their conduct. In other words, Mailer has so contrived things, notably by the speculations in nearly all of the Intro Beeps about the falsification implicit in all narrative form, that the mocking lit-crit media-packaged form given to everything in D.J.'s accelerated recollections is itself being mocked. The very status of the parody is brought into question.

For Mailer, and probably for any writer of the first rank, questions about literary form are simultaneously questions about the shape of human consciousness. That is why D.J.'s teasing and the joking about the authenticity of the form of his narrative also implies that he is lying about the past or, at the very least, that he is unable to tell the truth, especially about his own feelings at certain moments. At one point it even seems as if D.J. is temporarily dismissed as the narrator:

> Fuck this voice, why is D.J. hovering on the edge of a stall? Make your point! But D.J. is hung because the events now to be recounted in his private tape being made for the private ear of the Lord (such is the hypothesis now forging ahead) are hung up on a moment of the profoundest personal disclosure, in fact, dig, little punsters out in fun land, D.J. cannot go on because he has to talk about what Tex and him were presented with there all alone up above the Arctic Circle.

Even here we can't really believe what we're being told: the style in which we're informed that D.J. "cannot go on," like the style thereafter, is identifiably D.J.'s. The one exception, a long passage at the end of Chap 10, occurs over twenty pages later: the magnificent description of the scene around the pup tent just before the two boys go to sleep, alone in the Arctic wilderness. The feelings summoned to life in this passage might well have belonged to D.J., and might in some diluted form still circulate in him, but the im-

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plication is that in telling the story two years later in Dallas he hasn't the nerve, or the style, or, assuming he ever had it, a full consciousness of those feelings. It is really only here, and nowhere else in the book, that he is apparently silenced. Effectively enough, at least, so that the Chap which immediately follows, Chap 11, is the only one in the book without one of D.J.'s Intro Beeps. And this is the Chap in which the boys come close to a sexual joining. The surge of feeling that builds up in the passage at the end of Chap 10 and carries into 11 is noticeably free of the various cants and mixed media gags that otherwise lace every phrase throughout the book, even while carrying, as it must if it is to hint at existent if nearly inaccessible elements in D.J.'s consciousness, just the faintest touch of his recognizable style:

> . . . and D.J. full of iron and fire and faith was nonetheless afraid of sleep, afraid of wolves, full of beauty, afraid of sleep, full of beauty, yeah, he unashamed, for across the fire and to their side the sun was setting to the west of the pond as they looked north, setting late in the evening in remembering echo of the endless summer evening in these woods in June when darkness never came for the light never left, but it was going now, September light not fading, no, ebbing, it went in steps and starts, like going down a stair from the light to the dark, sun golden red in its purple and purple red in the black of the trees, the water was dark green and gold, a sigh came out of the night as it came on, and D.J. could have wept for a secret was near, some mystery in the secret of things — why does the odor die last and by another route? — and he knew then the meaning of trees and forest all in dominion to one another and messages across the continent on the wave of their branches up to the sorrow of the North, the great sorrow up here brought by leaves and wind some speechless electric gathering of woe, no peace in the North, not on top of the rim, and as the dark came down, a bull moose, that King Moose with antlers near to eight feet wide across all glory of spades and points, last moose of the North, came with his dewlap and his knobby knees and dumb red little eyes across the snow to lick at salt on the other side of the pond, and sunlight in the blood of its dying caught him, lit him, left him gilded red on one side as he chomped at mud and salt, clodding and wads dumping from his mouth to plop back in water, like a camel foraging in a trough, deep in content, the full new moon now up before the sun was final and down silvering the other side of this King Moose up to the moon silhouettes of platinum on his antlers and hide. And the water was black, and moose dug from it and ate, and ate some more until the sun was gone and only the moon for light and the fire

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> of the boys and he looked up and studied the fire some several hundred of feet away and gave a deep caw pulling in by some resonance of this grunt a herd of memories of animals at work and on the march and something gruff in the sharp wounded heart of things bleeding somewhere in that voice in the North which spoke beneath all else to Ranald Jethroe Jellicoe Jethroe and his friend Gottfried (Son of Gutsy) "Texas" Hyde. They were alone like that with the moose still staring at them. And then the moose turned and crossed the bowl the other way and plodded through the moonlight along the ridges of snow, moonlight in his antlers, gloom on his steps. And the boys slept.

A cadence that is to become more and more familiar in Mailer is beautifully at work here. It is to be found throughout *Of a Fire on the Moon,* with its constant telescoping of dimensions, and even more effectively in *The Armies of the Night,* in the passage about helicopters in "A Half-Mile to Virginia," and in his fanciful flights in "Grandma with Orange Hair," where he suggests that the poison of small town life has been released into the national bloodstreams because "technology had driven insanity out of the wind and out of the attic, and out of all the lost primitive places," only to concentrate it in Vegas, pro football, suburban orgies and, at last, Vietnam. The great achievement of the sentences in these instances, and in the passage from the novel, is that they allow the most supple possible movement back and forth between minutely observed "journalistic" details and a panorama that includes the forces that impinge upon and transform those details, perhaps to inconsequentiality. Thus the moose can be seen to have "knobby knees and dumb little red eyes," even while "the sunlight in the blood of its dying caught him, lit him, left him gilded red."

The cinematic effect of this kind of writing — which can be seen sometimes in Hemingway, as in "Hills Like White Elephants," and even more frequently in Faulkner — is especially right for Mailer. Before he managed to work such sentences with the power displayed here, his need for them was already implicit in his desire to bring various styles into the closest syntactical and grammatical conjunction, especially when he wants to mix obscenities with abstractions of theory. Even more, he needed some stylistic movement that would let him find in any particular item, like Negro jazz, manifestations of a confluence of forces. In "The White Negro" the need was notably apparent as a defect in those places where he was forced to conjure

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up reasoned arguments — as in his claim for the possible heroism of three young hoodlums who have killed an old grocery store keeper — where if the notion is to be promoted at all it would have to be by the power of style working to overturn rational conventions of cause and effect. And his discussion of context in the same essay, however confused, offers direct testimony that he wished consciously to blur the usual separations between an event, a participant in the event and the context.

In effect, each is a creation of the other. The context in which a man finds himself at any given moment derives in part from the failure or success he experienced in a previous and somehow related moment. So that the context for Mailer as writer of *The Armies of the Night* was importantly affected by the context of Mailer as actor, his inability as a participant in the Washington march to speak as often or as well as he would have liked. He writes as he does because he could not speak as he wanted to. Sentences of the kind being considered indicate in their very structure, that is, a writer who might have been predicted to choose, after *Why Are We in Vietnam?,* to write extraordinary spectacles. That is perhaps as good a term as any to describe *The Armies of the Night, Miami and the Siege of Chicago* and *Of a Fire on the Moon.* We are invited to see him in these books within intricately related fields of force, and then to watch him act simultaneously as a participant, witness and writer who evokes in the clashes of his style a "war" among the various elements that constitute the life of the country and of the self. Interestingly enough, the situation of D.J. and Tex when they camp down for the night is very similar to Mailer's: they are at a place where messages are gathered from the whole continent, we are told, and where there is, at the same time, "no peace."

In these instances Mailer's style, very much in a Faulknerian mode, keeps everything in motion; everything contends with, joins, is infused with everything else. Looking back at the passage just quoted, it might be said that Mailer's fondness for participles — "going," "fading," "settling," "silvering" — expresses his taste for actions that go on simultaneously, for a kind of bombardment of impressions, registered also in his repetitions of phrase, the echoings of sound, and the use of negatives which caution against fixing the picture in any familiar frame ("September light not fading, no,

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ebbing"). These habits, again as in Faulkner, are consistent with a tendency to collapse the rational insistence on distinctions between time and place, so that most get measured by the seasons, and between the presumably assigned functions of the senses, so that by a synesthesia of light and sound it can be suggested that the landscape sends out and receives signals. Nature, that is, has its own communications system without any need for technological assistance: it also has a memory that seems to work as well as a computer, made visible in the setting sun and audible in an animal grunt of the moose; it even expresses itself dialectically, as in the contending lights of the sun and moon on the two sides of the moose.

And yet if this landscape carries a message that the boys might possibly read, if its self-sufficiency frees it from human "shit" or from any kind of human genius in the form of technology, its beauty is wholly inhospitable to human love or tenderness or trust. No one could "relinquish" to it, as in Faulkner, and though the boys left their weapons behind, they wisely corrected a first impulse to leave everything and took along their bedroll, pup tent, food, matches and binoculars. They are going into a landscape antithetical to human life, and Mailer chose to imagine it that way, rather than as anything even momentarily hospitable, like the forest in which Isaac McCaslin learned to give up his more easily disposable inheritance of "shit." In the scene that follows, the landscape induces in them a need for love, for joining together. But this need cannot ever be separated from the accompanying and equally induced desire for power and domination. Each wants to enter the other; each knows he would be killed somehow if he ever succeeded. So as they lie together, tensed in desire and fear, there was

> . . . murder between them under all friendship, for God was a beast, not a man, and God said, "Go out and kill — fulfill my will, go and kill," and they hung there each of them on the knife of the divide in all conflict of lust to own the other yet in fear of being killed by the other and as the hour went by and the lights shifted, something in the radiance of the North went into them, and owned their fear, some communion of telepathies and new powers, and they were twins, never to be near as lovers again, but killer brothers, owned by something, prince of darkness, lord of light, they did not know.

Their love for each other is a minority element already sickened by a homoerotic lust for masculine power. Such, in general, is Mailer's

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view of the possibilities of homosexual love, as in his writing about Genet in *The Prisoner of Sex,* where he proposes that the irony of homosexual practices is that the seemingly passive partner is really trying to take on the masculine resources of the man who enters him, and often succeeds in doing so. Homosexuality is doomed, in his view, by a contest between the partners for sexual identity which each could achieve only with a woman; they compete for what each of them has surrendered, and the sexual act ceases to have any life-giving dialectical energy.

There is scarcely any point in arguing, as some have, that the boys might have been saved for humanity if they had been able to make love. I doubt that the question is a real one here or in any of the other American novels where one finds similar male pairings. The imagination of possible destinies for friends and neighbors is a legitimate and sometimes irresistible pastime, but it is a wholly inappropriate concern when it comes to characters in a book. D.J. and Tex, Huck and Jim, for that matter, exist not to enact a life but to help realize a form; they exist in and for a structure of meaning wherein character is merely one contributory item. Mailer's maneuver at the end of the novel in fact demonstrates how the form of the book cannot be wholly surrendered to the form even of the governing consciousness within it. D.J. cannot himself express that possible saving remnant of human feeling within him which was apparently deadened at Brooks Range by the "crystallization" of his and Tex's mind. And it is this same "crystallization" which in turn gives form to the narrative. We are at least allowed to wonder if D.J. and Tex possibly did have in them some filament of strangled humanity, and the pessimism of Mailer's view is most evident in the fact that when this humanity comes near to expressing itself its only possible form is buggery, which Tex indulges in now and then anyway, just for the hell of it.

The tenth of *The Presidential Papers,* entitled "Minorities," is given to a review of Genet's *The Blacks* which anticipates and helps explain the complex significance to *Why Are We in Vietnam?* — and also to Mailer's posture in it as a creator — of sexually perverse tensions, tensions of the kind found in Tex and D.J., in Rojack of *An American Dream* and in Mailer himself. Buggery between two men is the equivalent in sexual conduct of D.J.'s literary conduct in the

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whole book. I am speaking, again, of D.J. not merely as a character, a Texas adolescent, but as a unit of energy, a composite mind, a medium for the way things are. In effect this whole book is about buggery. D.J. is merely unable to accept the clearest evidence of this in his lust for Tex, while Tex, being a sometime bugger anyway, brings this propensity into the "electrified mind" which at the end is sealed as their common property. Recognizing this is important to an understanding of D.J.'s style, with its incessant jokes about buggery and the allusions to the North Pole as the hole of Satan. Another pair of travelers in Dante's Inferno, it might be remembered, also encounter the asshole of Satan: in the blooded arctic ices of the pit reserved for traitors. Mailer would know this, and his allusiveness in this case, interestingly enough, is never submitted to the destructive literary parody of D.J.

The book is about buggery because it is about the destruction of meaning, about that process of decreation which here, in its imagined sexual exercise, does not even alternate with acts of possible creation, as in the sexual exchange between Rojack and Ruta in *An American Dream*. The now actively functioning connection in Mailer's imagination between sexuality, creativity — meaning writing — and the state of culture is what makes *Why Are We in Vietnam?* perhaps his most brilliant and certainly one of his central texts. It realizes in a style of fantastic comic energy a position he had articulated in *The Presidential Papers*:

> As cultures die, they are stricken with the mute implacable rage of that humanity strangled within them. So long as it grows, a civilization depends upon the elaboration of meaning, its health maintained by an awareness of its state; as it dies, a civilization opens itself to the fury of those betrayed by its meaning, precisely because that meaning was finally not sufficiently true to offer a life adequately large. The aesthetic act shifts from the creation of meaning to the destruction of it.
>
> So, one could argue, functions the therapy of the surrealist artist, of Dada, of Beat. Jaded, deadened, severed from our roots, dulled in leaden rage, inhabiting the center of the illness of the age, it becomes more excruciating each year for us to perform the civilized act of contributing to a collective meaning. The impulse to destroy moves like new air into a vacuum, and the art of the best hovers, stilled, all but paralyzed between the tension to create and the urge which is its opposite. How well Genet personifies the dilemma. Out of the tension of his flesh, he makes the pirouette

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> of his art, offering meaning in order to adulterate it, until at the end we are in danger of being left with not much more than the Narcissism of his style. How great a writer, how hideous a cage. As a civilization dies, it loses its biology. The homosexual, alienated from the biological chain, becomes its center.

D.J.'s mind is an instrument for the destruction of meaning, as in the inveterate punning on names and identities, and the adulteration of the literary, philosophical, psychological authorities to which the book alludes. Indeed the implication is that the form of the book, which is also the form of D.J.'s memory, expresses the instinctive fury of a mind which feels itself betrayed by a civilization no longer able to sustain or elaborate in its language any meanings which provide a life adequately humane or large. The very effort to escape that civilization, to ventilate and cleanse the mind of its "mixed up shit," is betrayed both by the inhospitable landscape to which the act, by this point in the twentieth century, has of necessity been restricted, and by the implicit mockery of the act in the way literary analogues to it are suggested. D.J.'s memory is doomed to scatology, and, though he dare not bugger his mate, his mind is obsessed with jokes and images of buggery, of sexual entrances that lead not to the centers of creations but to the center of waste.

The book, like Mailer's comments on Genet, proposes a connection between creativity in art and in sex which takes us to the nerve of Mailer's sense of himself as a man and writer. "The art of the best hovers, stilled, all but paralyzed between the tension to create and the urge which is its opposite." It is at just such a point of near paralysis in the movement of *Why Are We in Vietnam?* that Mailer momentarily takes over the narrative from D.J. What then happens is an infusion of creative vitality into an imaginative landscape dominated by frigidities of environment and of feeling. The boys are doomed to the kind of masculinity which has none of the dialectical vitalities so profitably at work in Mailer, of being female as well as male, of feeling a space within where the gestations of imagination take place, and a keen sense of the space without, which calls forth the will and lust for public power. He had already written in his long debate about scatology, "The Metaphysics of the Belly," that "if we wish to be more masculine we must first satisfy something feminine in ourselves" [*The Presidential Papers*]. The homosexual urges of D.J. and Tex promise the reverse of this satisfaction.

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All they will produce is a competitive effort which will affirm the mastery of an unmodified masculinity, a narcissism of masculinity which becomes homoerotic from the desire to engross the masculinity of an equally obsessed man. They are Mailerian boxers *manqué*.

For Mailer, a masculine nature that denies the minority claims within it of feminine feeling — which is how he might account for a masculinized sensibility like Kate Millett's — chills the imagination, prevents it from encompassing even such admission of feminine inclination, or the need of masculine support, as D.J. might have had to make in order to recall his desires for Tex. That is why Mailer, at the appropriate point, has to imagine these desires for him, and for the book, even if it means that the book doesn't become "crystallized." Mailer's commitment to dialectics means that he includes materials which threaten the symmetry of any possible form. His is the art of not arriving. In this case, and throughout his work, dialectics is equivalent to imagination, and imagination evolves from his acceptance in himself of a feminine nature. It is probable that he associates being a writer with being a woman, and his remark in *The Prisoner of Sex* about Henry Miller and Kate Millett, even to the feminization of the males he alludes to ("dances," "curves") is a telling instance: "His work dances on the line of his dialectic. But Millett hates every evidence of the dialectic. She has a mind like a flatiron, which is to say a totally masculine mind. A hard-hat has more curves in his head." If writing, creativity, a personal style as opposed to an imposed one, could all be associated with femininity, then Mailer's selection of subjects, like war, boxing, politics, moonshots and his own brawling activities, about which he writes with a boyishly self-approving apology, can be taken as counterbalancing attempts to affirm his masculinity.

In some such way it is possible to understand a central contradiction in him: there is on the one hand the marvelously fastidious stylist, a writer almost precious in his care for phrasing and cadence, and, on the other and seemingly at odds, the boisterous, the vulgar actor. More often than not his style will sound like Faulkner or James, like Proust or Lawrence, even while he is pushing Papa Hemingway as a model and precursor. As recently as *Cannibals and Christians* he misreads Lawrence out of what I would guess is an anxiety to appear tougher than he really is, which means that Law-

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rence must be made less so. Lawrence, he there claims, is so sentimental about lovers that he misses their desire to "destroy one another; lovers change one another; lovers resist the change that each gives to the other." This is of course not what Lawrence misses. It is what he insists on. Not Lawrence but Mailer is deficient in imagining such relationships between a man and a woman. When the sexes meet in his novels it is either for frantic sexual experiences or for conferences about manners and role playing that never significantly modify either one. When he tries to get beyond this, as in *An American Dream,* he surrounds the relationship with portents and circumstances that prevent it from ever becoming more than an alliance for some mutual escape to an imagined ordinariness never to be achieved. Perhaps the reason for this is that the conflicts that might bring about a change in the relationships between men and women actually take place only *within* the nature of all the men in his works, within his own nature. Mailer is finally the most androgynous of writers. Perhaps that is why, of what are now eighteen books, only five are novels, a form where some developed relationship between the sexes is generally called for, and the rest, except for a quite good volume of poems entitled *Death for the Ladies (and Other Disasters)* and the scripts for his play *The Deer Park* and his film *Maidstone,* is a species of self-reporting.

And yet for all the self-reporting what do we know about him? Very little. Nothing to do with his childhood, his schooling, very little about his love affairs, not much more about his friends or his wives. Though there are bits of incidental intelligence about drinking and drugs in *Advertisements for Myself* and about his fourth marriage in *The Armies of the Night* and *Of a Fire on the Moon,* and though we learn in *The Prisoner of Sex* that for part of one summer he kept house for six children before an old love, who was to become the mother of a seventh, arrived to rescue him, most of what we get from this presumably self-centered, egotistic and self-revealing writer are anecdotes about his public performances. Even these prove to be not confessions so much as self-creations after the event, presentations of a self he makes up for his own as much as for the reader's inspection.

This is not said critically but rather to suggest that Mailer's genius is excited by those very elements in him and in the nation

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which prevent the solidification of either one. Solidification, or what D.J. calls "crystallization," is not the function of Mailer's art and is instead ascribed to those forces in contemporary civilization to which his art opposes itself. With what seems at times obtuseness he chooses to put his stress of appreciation on those aspects of a subject which anyone working in the rationalist, humanist, liberal tradition would generally choose to ignore or condemn. He is therefore necessarily committed to the democratic principle that all parts of any subject are at least initially equal. Like Glenn Gould playing Bach or Beethoven, Mailer decides that what everyone else treats as a subordinate sound can be treated as a major one. This significantly complicates the responses called forth by some of the characters in his later work. Thus, while D.J. and Tex are agents of some horrid, proliferating power that propels America into Vietnam, they are also in another sense "good." They are emphatically and unapologetically what they are; they do what they do well, and it is possible in Mailer to do anything well, to perform well even in the act of murder.

For that reason the obscenity in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* is not a symptom of what is the matter with D.J. Instead it is a clue to what might possibly be "good" about him. In "An Evening with Jackie Kennedy, or, the Wild West of the East," Mailer proposed to tell her "that the obscene had a right to exist in the novel," a desire typical of his wish to bring apparently uncongenial ideas into situations designed to exclude them. As "queen of the arts" she would understand, he likes to think, that it was "the purpose of culture finally to enrich all the psyche, not just part of us" because "Art in all its manifestations . . . including the rude, the obscene, and the unsayable . . . was as essential to the nation as technology" [*The Presidential Papers*]. Elsewhere he makes the point that an artist who does not bring into art those qualities which might disrupt formal coherence is guilty of doing to art, and to culture, what Eisenhower did to politics during what were for Mailer the worst years of his time in America: "he did not divide the nation as a hero might (with a dramatic dialogue as a result); he merely excluded one part of the nation from the other. The result was an alienation of the best minds and bravest impulses from the faltering history which was made" [*The Presidential Papers*].

Mailer will exclude nothing in the interests of formal arrange-

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ments. This has led to the most consistent misunderstandings of his work, a failure to grasp why he is of necessity given to obscenity and violence. In "An Impolite Interview" with Paul Krassner of *The Realist,* he makes his position on these matters clear enough, but in such a way as to perhaps only further confuse his detractors. Alluding to an Italian bombardier who reported that the bombs bursting over an Ethiopian village were beautiful, he writes that while he does not necessarily disapprove of violence in a man or a woman "what I still disapprove of is *inhuman* violence," which is of course the kind infused into D.J. and Tex at Brooks Range.

> I disapprove of bombing a city. I disapprove of the kind of man who will derive aesthetic satisfaction from the fact that an Ethiopian village looks like a red rose at the moment the bombs are exploding. I won't disapprove of the act of perception which witnesses that: I think that act of perception is — I'm going to use the word again — noble.
>
> What I am getting at is: a native village is bombed, and the bombs happen to be beautiful when they land; in fact it would be odd if all that sudden destruction did not liberate some beauty. The form a bomb takes in its explosion may be in part a picture of the potentialities it destroyed. So let us accept the idea that the bomb is beautiful.
>
> If so, any liberal who decries the act of bombing is totalitarian if he doesn't admit as well that the bombs were indeed beautiful.
>
> Because the moment we tell something that's untrue, it does not matter how pure our motives may be — the moment we start mothering mankind and decide that one truth is good for them to hear and another is not so good, because while we can understand, those poor ignorant unfortunates cannot — then what are we doing, we're depriving the minds of others of knowledge which may be essential.
>
> Think of a young pilot who comes along later, some young pilot who goes out on a mission and isn't prepared for the fact that a bombing might be beautiful; he could conceivably be an idealist, there were some in the war against Fascism. If the pilot is totally unprepared he might never get over the fact that he was particularly thrilled by the beauty of that bomb.
>
> But if our culture had been large enough to say that Ciano's son-in-law not only found that bomb beautiful, but that indeed this act of perception was *not* what was wrong; the evil was to think that this beauty was worth the lot of living helpless people who were wiped out broadside. Obviously whenever there's destruction, there's going to be beauty implicit in it.

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Truth for Mailer is equivalent to the acceptance, with respect to any subject, of such a range of diverse feelings that some seem to cancel or mutilate the others, and there are times when his commitment to truth cannot escape a perverse exaltation of the submerged at the expense of the humanly self-evident. While he is clearly aware of this danger, he will not allow the presumed exigencies of the humanly self-evident, much less the exigencies of literary form or of logic, to dictate what he puts in or leaves out. This is what distinguishes him from his contemporaries in fiction. However different, they all find it necessary at some point to suppress what I've called the minority within: those feelings, expressions, possibilities in the material that are perhaps incommensurate with the effect being striven for. Mailer's honesty in this is rather more strenuous than theirs and finally more self-sacrificing.

Unfortunately the most noble of instincts have a way of being transformed first into self-consciousness, then into habit, and finally into mechanics. What was once a virtue becomes a tic; what was once romantic becomes, as Byron discovered, burlesque. Increasingly to the detriment of his work, Mailer often creates divisions in his material so simplistically extreme as to allow him an unearned rest, exonerated, in the middle of it all, freed of choice or even temptation. Positioned between extremities which he has himself invented and which are by no means made necessary by the nature of what he is trying to account for, he reveals at times "some wistful desires to be less extraordinary," a desire attributed to Cherry in *An American Dream.* Being among the most self–scrutinizing of writers and his own best critic, he has come even to wonder in *The Prisoner of Sex* "if his vision, for lack of some cultivation in the middle, was not too compulsively ready for the apocalyptic." "Cultivation" is the important clue here; he thinks of the middle as a place where his imagination does not instinctively move and where it becomes flabby. *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* and *Of a Fire on the Moon* are the clearest instances, and it is significant that both involved him in events in which for various reasons he could not directly participate. In the one his deadline for the book prevented him from acting in any way that might get him arrested, as he was in the Washington of *The Armies of the Night;* in the other, the very nature of technological enterprise excluded from

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participation anyone not expertly tooled into it. An unwanted self-pity has become the sign of such moments ("no revolution had arisen in the years when he was ready — the timing of his soul was apocalyptically maladroit" [*Miami and the Siege of Chicago*], he tells us while watching the Yippies from the nineteenth floor of his hotel), along with a hectoring, envious tone with respect to persons and a stylistic failure to engage himself except through easy hyperbole. Are we really to think that the vibration of Yippie music in Lincoln Park "was the road of the beast in all nihilism" [*Miami and the Siege of Chicago*], or rather that the sound reminded Mailer that his own voice simply could not be accommodated to it?

Though there are some stunning exceptions, like the last chapter "A Burial by the Sea" in *Of a Fire on the Moon,* there is disturbing evidence that Mailer's imagination of himself is becoming dangerously rigid and circumscribed, particularly when he indulges in rather simple and fashionable concerns about the future of the imagination in an age of science and technology. Where before there was a marvelously supple, intimate and daring search within his schematizations for pressures that would unsettle them, there is at the moment a tendency to insist that the events or persons he writes about should fit the scheme.

Now at a crisis in his writing equivalent, I suspect, to the early period of exhaustion after *The Deer Park,* Mailer is uniquely situated to escape the entrapment that often turns American writers into imitators and finally into unconscious parodists of themselves. His situation is unique because some of his most brilliant work is literary self-criticism. In *The Prisoner of Sex* there are already hints of a healthy negative assessment of where he is, of boredom with characteristic and familiar ways of doing things. Finally, he is even at "war" with his own achievement, and out of this may emerge still other, different forms for himself, for contemporary life and for our language.

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Larry Neal

UNCLE RUFUS RAPS ON THE SQUARED CIRCLE

Once I saw a prize fighter boxing a yokel. The fighter was swift and amazingly scientific. His body was one violent flow of rapid rhythmic action. He hit the yokel a hundred times while the yokel held up his arms in stunned surprise. But suddenly the yokel, rolling about in the gale of boxing gloves, struck one blow and knocked science, speed and footwork as cold as a well-digger's posterior. The smart money hit the canvas. The long shot got the nod. The yokel had simply stepped inside of his opponent's sense of time. . . .

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

Sporting events, like beauty contests, horse shows, public assassinations — all forms of spectacle — have implicit within them a distinct metaphysical character, said Uncle Rufus while lighting his cigar. We had been talking about the Ali–Frazier fight. He had once been a boxer. Then later he became a singer and dancer in a minstrel show. Needless to say, Uncle Rufus is a most fascinating gentleman. Following our discussion, I discovered that he was one of the prime sources for Melvin B. Tolson's extremely muscular masterpiece entitled

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The Harlem Gallery. Further, Uncle Rufus staunchly maintains that he knew the real John Henry who, by the way, was an excellent bare-knuckle fighter.

The day after the Ali–Frazier fight, I met him uptown at a little spot in Harlem called My Bar. The bar is a very hip joint. It's run by a tall yellow guy named Julian May. It's a good place to talk all kinds of sports. Julian's got himself a brand new color TV in the back room. And there's a bartender there, Ray, who is a statistical and historical expert on all sports, especially the ones in which we dominate, or the ones in which we have determined the stylistic mode and strategy. But Ray would never speak in these terms, he absorbs his data on sports because he loves them and sees them as significant encounter with the unknowable nature of the world. Ray's attitude towards sports like boxing, football and basketball is a healthy blend of the mysterious and scientific.

I am sitting at the bar, discussing with Ray the function of energy in athletics when Uncle Rufus bops into the door. He peacocks in a pearl gray Homburg. The coat is blue cashmere. He sports a golden-headed serpent cane; the shoes, French, Shriner and Urner, contrast exquisitely with his spats which are the same pearl gray color as the Homburg.

I order him a Jack Daniels, and introduce him to Ray. A discussion ensues concerning the geometry of basketball. I feel shut out of the conversation; and besides, I didn't invite my Uncle here to talk about basketball. I was really getting irritated with the whole thing when some customers finally worked into the bar.

So now that I had Uncle Rufus to myself, I asked him his opinion of the Ali–Frazier fight. He began the discussion with some commentary on a few of the events that transpired in the aftermath of Jack Johnson's victory over Jim Jefferies back in Reno on July 4th, 1910.

"It was during the days of the steamboat, and after that famous bout," he said, "there was fighting going on between the blacks and the whites. This happened because the whites were so infuriated by Jack's victory that they began beating up on the colored. A man got lynched in Cape Giradeau when he tried to collect a bet he had made with a white farmer by the name of Cyrus Compton.

"I was working on a show called Stall's Minstrels. Now this show was out of Cairo, Illinois, which is smack on the Mississippi River. But we was working in a dance hall in Henderson, Kentucky. I think they called that hall The Stomp. All the great troupes had worked it. *The Creole Show* and *Black Patti's Troubadours* had also been through

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there. And while I was in Henderson, I heard a splendid concert of operatic selections by Sissieretta Jones."

"Well what about the fight?" I asked.

"Oh . . . the fight? Which fight?"

"It's hard to tell now; I asked you about the Ali–Frazier fight, and you started talking about Jack Johnson which, it seems to me, doesn't have much to do with this conversation."

"Let's put it this way son: You order me another one of these Jack Daniels, and sit back patiently so you can learn something for once in your life."

If you wasn't my Uncle Rufus, I would tell you to go and eat shit, talking to me that way.

"Never mind that . . . I want it on the rocks with water on the side."

I ordered the drink. Ray came over, poured his drink then mine. I think I saw them exchange winks.

"Well as I was trying to say, I was in Henderson, and I heard that they was fighting and all."

"*Who* was fighting and all?"

"The colored and white.

"They say, no sooner did Jack win the match than the fighting broke out. Well, I was in Henderson, and I heard that they was fighting in Evansville, Indiana. Evansville is right across the Ohio River from Henderson, so I went up there. Man, even with the fighting and all going on, them colored people was celebrating. But not like they was doing in '35 when Joe Louis won his match against Carnera. No it was nothing compared to that. But it was still some celebration.

"The next day, after the all-night-long parties, some smart-ass little colored boy by the name of Open Mouth Rainey got shot to death in the Silver Dollar Bar and Grill. It seems this guy, Open Mouth, strolled into the restaurant and asked the owner for a cup of coffee as strong as Jack Johnson, and a steak beat up like Jim Jefferies. When he said that, the owner slapped him, reaching quickly for his six-shooter which was right under the counter. Open Mouth Rainey pulled his forty-four, but it was too late. The man had gotten the drop on Open Mouth. He burned him five times. Open Mouth barely had a chance. Let me tell you: some of them crackers was sure mad that a nigger was now the heavyweight champion of the world.

"But the colored knew that it was quite natural for there to be a black champion. Since we was the first boxers in this country anyway. You see, Larry, boxing started out in Virginia. There it was the custom for the sons of aristocratic families to go to England where they re-

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ceived a first-rate education in the humanities. Also, while there, they were supposed to acquire the finer virtues by circulating among and socializing with the English gentry. Now along with education of the mind went the education of the body. Therefore, they were trained in the manly art of boxing. Now these scions of Southern aristocracy returned home from England with a good education and a knowledge of the rudiments of boxing. Back home, they started training some of the young slaves to be boxers. So they held contests among the slaves from different plantations.

"Pugilism, as it relates to us, son, got its formal start, however, with the career of one Tom Molyneaux. Mr. Molyneaux was the first colored champion. He was born in Virginia, a slave; and when he was, through some mysterious process, granted his freedom, he traveled to New York. By then, he had beaten everybody around, both Negroes and whites. Then he went to England to fight Tom Cribb who was then the world champion. This fight took place in December of 1810; I forget the exact date. But it was at Capthall Common in Sussex. These were the days before the Queensbury rules. As I recall, it was a dreary day, the fight lasted forty rounds. Tom Cribb won, but a lots of folks, particularly a guy they called West Indian Charlie, protested that there was tricknology involved in Cribb's victory. But be that as it may, that's how the colored got into boxing.

"All of the plantation owners, from all points, used to gather at their respective plantations to place wagers on one slave or the other. These men were all gentlemen, fine education, breeding, and plenty of money. So in many ways, they didn't care who really won the fight. It was all just considered good sport. They liked the way them niggers circled each other and doing them fancy steps, and dropping them bombs and do. Naturally, they got specially excited when one of them fellers drew blood. I once saw two slaves beat each other to death."

It is late in the afternoon, sun swarming all over us. I am inside of a bull of a man named Silas. Amos swings a wild right at me. I block it easily, but he catches me with a left hook. It seems like all day we have been fighting like this. My arms and his arms are heavy, but we smash at each other and at the white blurry faces surrounding us. We go on like this until the sun begins going down. . . . The shouting and the rooting has died down now; now we lean on each other breathing hard and tied up in sweat like wrestlers. The contest has boiled down to grunts and awkward swings. . . . As darkness comes, we are both still standing. Judge Tate calls it a tie. They throw me in the buckboard, and carry me back to the plantation.

"You got the right idea son. That's almost exactly how it was in

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those days. Yeah, that's just the way it went down. Them folks really liked the sports. And since they had lots of money, and not much to do, they just gambles all the time.

"Yes siree, them folks liked the sports and the sporting houses too. And I'm sure you know that they had betting tables in them houses too. An ex-boxer by the name of Bill Richmond ran one of the biggest whore houses in the city of New Orleans; but even though he himself was colored, he didn't allow no colored in there — 'cept them girls he had working for him.

"I told you I used to be a boxer before I went to Stall's Minstrels. Woody Johnson was manager (may he rest in peace). I was swift and dancy, in the bantamweight class, like Eligio Sardinas who was otherwise known as "Kid Chocolate." I had me a pretty snappy jab, and my left hook was a monster. I got tired of the fight game though. And then I decided to go into show business. Why? 'Cause there was some very nice people in the business in those days, real educated and refined people like J. Rosamund Johnson. And I wanted to be one of them. So I gave up the fight game, even though I was good. In my time, I was on good terms with boxers like Battling Siki, Tiger Flowers, Joe Gans, Sammy The Smasher and Sam Langford. Me and Sam used to party a lot together. I'm not just name-dropping son; I'm simply giving you my credentials so you will fully appreciate the facts I'm about to give you concerning the squared circle.

"A lots of black guys started hanging round the sporting events. In those days, we referred to these guys as the "Sporting Crowd"; or we called them "Sports" for short. Now all these sportsmens was fast livers. They dressed in the latest fashions, and wore finely tailored suits. Jelly Roll Morton used to hang around with that bunch quite often. Jelly Roll was the real sporting type. He played a wicked piano, was a ladies' man, spoke French and had him a diamond ring on every finger. He even had a diamond in his middle tooth. You was liable to see old Jelly Roll anywhere and with anybody. He was around boxers and jockeys as much as he was round musicians.

"Well now that we're talking about Jelly Roll, this brings me to the part of my discussion about boxing in general, and the Ali–Frazier fight in particular. Did you know that there is a distinct connection between boxing and music? You say you didn't know that? Well there is. You see it's like this: boxing is just another kind of rhythm activity. Like all sports is based on rhythm. Dig: if you ain't got no rhythm, you can't play no sports. Like jumping rope ain't nothing but dancing. Beating on the punching-bag is the same as beating on drums. Everything connected with sports is connected with rhythm. You just think

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about it for a while. Every fighter has his own particular rhythmic style just the way musicians do. You ever notice that some fighters dance around a lot, doing fast rhythms; while some other guy is slower, likes to do the slow-drag instead of the Lindy Hop or the jitterbug. Yes, Larry, this is so with all of its possible variations.

"All sports are just expressions of a particular attitude toward rhythm. But boxing unlike many other sports confines the players to a very small area of confrontation. Boxers are contained within a square. And this makes for particular difficulties. But it also makes for the particular attraction to the sport. Most men can identify with the sport because most men, at one time or the other, have had to hold their hands up. But what about the square? What has it to do with the sport? Well the square symbolizes a discrete universe. That is to say, it brings to bear upon the material universe a particular sense of order. All geometrical constructs do. For example, the triangle, the Trinity and other ternary clusters seem to represent spiritual dynamism. The circle, on the other hand, represents some aspect of infinity. Perhaps oneness in God. The square, in its quaternary aspect, appears to symbolize the material realm, or the rational intellect. There is a negative aspect to the square though. In some ways the square implies stasis, and even decadence. But regardless of all of these factors, the square is the context in which one fighter confronts another one.

"Here we are dealing with the underlying premises behind the sport. We could say something about ritual here, but that side of the street has already been covered in great detail by Mr. Jack Johnson in his autobiography. Instead here, we are discussing the metaphysics of geometrical and dynamic modality.

"Now there are several things that determine the winner of a fight, or any sporting contest for that matter. But all of these things are essentially tied up with rhythm. Because even though there is an implied circle within the square (and naturally without the square), one rhythmically described by the fighters themselves, the square, in this connection, is the creation of a particular historical sensibility. This sensibility manifests itself in all spheres of life and art. We see it asserting itself in architecture, technology and sociopolitical theories. The circle, on the other hand, exists as an ever evolving metaconstruct. The fighter's duty is to rhythmically discern the essential unity between the circle and the square.

"Take this Muhammed Ali, for example; he knows all about squares and circles cause he is a Muslim. And all of them folks knows all about things like that. Like 360^{0}=Allah. That kind of thing. He even know about rhythm. I hear he's a poet. Rhythm concerns the

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modality of space, sound, motion and existence. Both space and motion can be manipulated rhythmically. Existence can also be manipulated in like manner; but we'll deal with that some other time when we are discussing contests that involve more than four persons. If we went into that now, we would have to discuss history, and that bitch is not the subject of my discussion.

"All fighters must understand the principles of rhythmic modality. The fighter who best understands these principles will most likely win the contest. Again, young man, rhythm here refers to the duration and the structure of the contest, its interlocking spatial and dynamic relationships, the manner in which one proceeds to handle the space dominated by his own body, and the body of his opponent. It also refers to the artistic or technical manipulation of the space encompassed by the square which these fools erroneously call the "ring." By the use of a calculus, therefore, we arrive at the conclusion that the Ali–Frazier fight was, in fact, a contest of essentially different attitudes toward music.

"This was the secret wisdom that Jelly Roll Morton passed on to boxers of the twenties. This principle was orally transmitted through a long line of boxers until it was momentarily obscured by Floyd Patterson who was the first Hamlet of the boxing profession.

"Now Ali understands these principles of rhythm and music. Theoretically, that's what's so sweet about him. You see, he believes in riffing. He certainly has got the body, the legs and the mouth for it. But Frazier is somewhere else in the musical universe. Frazier is stomp–down blues, bacon, grits and Sunday church. Course them Muslims is different. They don't be eating none of that hog. They say it ruin your brains. It didn't seem to do Frazier no harm though, 'cept he do seem a little slow with the rap sometimes. But Joe Louis, an Alabama boy, raised on black strap molasses, was slow with the rap too. And you know how mean he could be upon entering the squared circle. But Ali is body bebop. While Frazier is slow brooding blues with a gospel bearing. Ali understands the mysteries of the circles and the squares, the same as Suffi poets do. That is to say Larry, the essential metaphysics of these forms are, for him, a constant source of religious and intellectual meditation. Ali prays (does his salats) in quiet meditation. But most likely, Frazier wants to shout in church. However, Ali, as a Muslim intellectual, has been forced to suppress his gospel impulse. But he can't suppress it totally. You can still hear it in his voice when he speaks, or when he tries to sing. But blues and gospel ain't his thing. Frazier can't sing, but he sings better than Ali. And that's why Frazier won the fight.

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"I don't mean that he outsung Ali during the fight. I mean, instead, that he sang his particular song better than Ali sang his. Old slow-blues, pork-eating Frazier is moody and relentless. He got plenty killer in him. But bebop-body, your man, is the urbanized philosopher of the would-be righteous, the future shaper in many respects. However, he is a blasé singer, having a tendency to sound down mammy-loving country boys who lack causes, and who are grateful for any desperate break they can get. Boys like Frazier envision purple suits, full length Russian sable, biege El Dorados, the perfumed cluster of female flesh and triumphant kisses from the Sepia Queen.

"Ali envisions a Nation full of intricate order, like an interlocking network of squares and rectangles. He dreams of kissing the black stone of Mecca. No loose perfumed ladies there. Perhaps there, mosques fly as zones of ultimate righteousness. The Muslim women wear long dresses; they pursue long periods of silence as they side-step sin, murmuring polite Koranic knowledge.

"Your problem, my boy, primarily concerns making both of them understand the implicit unity between the circle and the square. Using a variant of the calculus that we set up earlier, I would say, therefore, that Frazier needs Ali's squares, and Ali needs Frazier's circles. I can't see it no other way.

"The essential dynamics of the squared circle demand that each contestant really understand how he sings best. That he choreograph and orchestrate his game in terms of what he does best. Theoretically, everyone in the sporting game knows this. But the pragmatics or translation of this abstract knowledge often eludes us. In the case of the particular spectacle under discussion, the fighters were very much evenly matched. They just simply manifested different choreographic styles. But given the pressure of the evening, its particular psychological atmosphere, its *forced* political overtone, the winner would be the one who most acutely understood the principles of spatial and psyche rhythm. Ali's science was winning until the first stunning blow caught him somewhere around the eighth round. (Note the quaternity of the number eight [8].) But Ali also had not paced himself properly from the beginning of the match. He allowed himself to enter Frazier's system of deceptive choreography; a system full of treacherous memories that lay in the cut ready to pummel that bebopping body of his. The way to fight slow grinding powerhouses like Frazier is to not let them touch you at all — if it's humanly possible. Because, beneath that dull rap, there is a mad churning engine. And you have got to respect that kind of power."

He looked at his watch. "How about one for the road?" I said.

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"That's all right with me, but it has got to be a quickie. I'm supposed to meet this chippy in a little while."

When the next round of drinks came, I toasted him and thanked him for his time. "Wow! Uncle Rufus, all the time you was talking you never told me who you were pulling for."

He looked at me long and hard. Then his black face broke into sarcastic smile. He reached down beneath the bar stool, and pulled his cane out. He held it up so that the golden-headed serpent would glitter as it caught the low amber light of the My Bar. He looked at the cane, and then at me. I could see now, looking at him full in the face, that he was really much older than he seemed. I saw the cane swiftly fly back. Before I had time to react, Uncle Rufus had whacked me hard across my arm.

"What was that about?" I whined, rubbing my aching arm.

"It's about you not learning to ask the right questions, especially after I done took all this time explaining things to you. Sheeet! I really shouldn't give you no answer. But since you once told me you wanted to be a boxer, here it is: I was pulling for *both* of them. But this time, your old uncle put his money on slow blues. . . ."

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POEMS

FACES

When the XIX Legion was caught in the swamps of the Rhine
And bushwacked there by the natives,
Their armor dragging them into the mud,
And not a man among them lived to tell how they died
Or what they caught in the frame of their face
When the last stroke fell,
And when Germanicus found them at last,
They were gone.
The mud had grown over the ripples they made.
Only their faces, nailed to the trees, remained.

When Jezebel, the haughty queen of an alien land,
Ran barefoot through all the men in her court,
Touching their hearts lightly
With the crescent of her toes, the palms of her hands
Easing their flesh as she ran,
They gave her to the dogs at last
In the heat of her running, the burst of her lungs,
And they pulled her down, and they ate her
Except for the soles of her lovely feet
And the white palms of her hands.

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ADVERTISEMENT

I wonder whatever happened to
The beautiful advertisements of my youth
I used to see through the bars of the streetcar windows
Lurching to town in the old inevitable way
Where everything I knew I loved and loved because I knew
Slid through my heart like blood on iron wheels,
The cleanest dreams in town . . .

I mean the mysterious things in the billboards
That said just like mother made
Only more so things you couldn't understand,
Or the 100-year-old bread
(Long corridors and dusky limbs of Egyptian
Girls, dancing at orgies. A sudden plague.
Immediate death. And the bread on the table
Uneaten. Unearthed a hundred years later
By sterilized men in beards and white coats
Who carry it in wrappers of antique gold
To the A&P across the Park for the Keenans),
Or the Planters Peanut that walked the streets and gave
Himself away on a spoon, with the imploring eyes
Of a man inside the uncracked shell of death,
Or the car in the tree forty feet high
(Amos' Auto Parts and Welding Service)
And me wondering how it got there
Through most of the days of my formative years
And learning at last in the stillness of sleep that it grew
There, the rusting petals of the yellow convertible
Clashing like thunder at night in its angry unfolding.

All the innocent, contrived conceits of my boyhood,
Polished and mannered as my grandfather, who lived
By a code of ethics in business and died, in a way,
Like a man who stuck his humming head inside
The engine of a car at Hendrick's Service Station
And had it eaten off up to the hips,
The legs still there when I was a boy,
Dribbled on the edge of the open maw like seaweed,
Sucking in the customers rain or shine.

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LIGHTNING BUGS

We used to take an old lamp with the bulb out
And a steel wire from a milk bottle top
Twisted and stuck in the lamp to make contact
And run it out to the hogwire fence
When they were rising like static around us
And electrocute the lightning bugs in a shower of sparks.
Great power flowed in the current of our hands
As we probed with the electric tip of our minds
For whatever it was in the core of light
That burned all day in the heart of things
And rose in the night, in the dazzling darkness,
And swarmed from the shadowy forms of the earth
Like pulses of thought — the white, elliptical ghosts
Of trees, the fiery tip in each blade
Of grass, and the pastures rising above themselves,
All in their own true forms at last,
Like the souls of the just. And we were plugged into
It all we believed and flowed with a power that leaped
In invisible arcs from the static swirling of stars
In space and the flames of unknown galaxies, down
To our illumined heads and out the sockets
Of our eyes along the wire to the fiery fence,
Where the bugs we impaled turned crisp and died,
Oozing their liquid jelly of light
While we turned green as fox fire, our hands
And mysterious fingers, even the hair and grain of our skin
Streaked and smeared with gleams of solid light.
And then, then we stalked through the dark of our childhood
Like *ignes fatui* following the luminous forms
Of ourselves, grim as ghosts haunting our bodies
Back to the blinding effulgence of home.

Frank Manley

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WOMEN AT FORTY

are filled with force they rage
and stamp in their fields
their breasts swell with all
the things they've never tried
their skin
softens to suede
smoothing over old blemishes
their legs are slim they compare
favorably with their daughters
they stand half-way looking
as far ahead as behind
their sex is ripe with assurance
their men
scratch their heads and pull
their ears
women at forty
sit on volcanoes they hold
their fingers in flames
they pan for gold they are
prospectors they are tycoons
they juggle millions
they are collectors they are new
museums
they are dynamos it's their turn
they have gathered solar
heat and kilowatts
to burn

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PRACTICE ROOMS

Music keeps me going. It drives me
up to the sour wax rooms on the sly.
The rooms jangle their collections
of missed notes. I
and my black master: an old relationship,
an old gamble on the long dice.

My fingers never forget; fingers
conduct their own wars.
Set them off and they
annihilate the enemy. They
stamp out fires, they step from
Vienna to Warsaw in one stride.
They are timeless. They tick
off their own minutes
and the spaces in between. And the
spaces in between are filled with
fresh limes. And I am playing them.
I am playing them! The notes are
on wheels. They gather speed.

Vendor! Vendor!

I pedal my huge tricycle filled
with fruits and earthquakes. Their tremors
radiate through the spaces where
the fresh juice runs down my chin.
I pump. I pump. The moth
is shaken from the felts of his banquet.
Wasps scatter pamphlets of wings
over the trenches. The worm sings
in the hall of the apple.

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But I am still here. My fingers
have not left me. The window's
green lid snaps wide open and the sunlight
is wounded. This is why it limps away
on crutches of shadow. Blocks
of granite lean and right themselves
at the last minute.

My fingers. My marchers.
Slipping on their own sweat and then
regaining their balance. Suffering
in stiff boots.

Green rinds litter the streets.
The centuries have cracked. Flakes
of varnish chip from your black mahogany.
Dust sifts through a trap of
light on the floor. Footsteps
have slowed to listen at the door.

I have done what you wanted.
Until the next time.
I am playing softly now.

I am going.

My room shakes.

Anne Hussey

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ABANDONED RANCH, BIG BEND

Three people come where no people belong any more.
They are a woman who would be young
And good-looking if these were accounted
Real qualities, a child with yellow hair, a man
Hardened in desperate humanity. But here are only
Dry cistern, adobe flaking, a lizard, and now this
Disagreeable feeling that they were summoned. Sun
On the corrugated roof is like a horse treading,
A horse with wide wings and heavy hoofs. The lizard
Is splayed head down on the wall, pulsing. They do not
Bother to lift their binoculars to the shimmering distance.
From this dead center the desert spirals away,
Traveling outward and inward, pulsing. Summoned
From half across the world, from snow and rock,
From chaos, they arrived a moment ago, they thought,
In perfect fortuity. There is a presence emerging here in
Sun dance and clicking metal, where the lizard blinks
With eyes of ancient recognition; then swirling
Outward again, outward and upward through the sky's
White-hot funnel. Again and again among the dry
Wailing voices of displaced Yankee ghosts
This ranch is abandoned to terror and the sublime.
The man turns to the woman and child. He has never
Said what he meant. They give him
The steady cool mercy of their unreproachful eyes.

Hayden Carruth

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HOW THE PLAINS INDIANS GOT HORSES

for Two Skies, a chief of the Humanos, a Texas tribe

1
If dogs had been your sole stock and trade
and during dry season
you had had to strap
your whole household
to a travio
to be dragged across the backside of a desert,
barely a foot from
bare earth, through scrub-brush,
mesquite, scab-cactus,
at each rest your two red feet
begging to be walked out of —

and sick of the whining and fleas
and meat-eating hunger (this animal
that will eat its own excrement
and urinates constantly)

and sometimes making only ten miles a day —

if on that sixth in a succession of the worst
you saw one, for the first time,
looking hornless and man-tall
at the shoulder,
perhaps fifty, a hundred yards off,
deep in its own peace,
taking water
in a deep, green place,
and you by now tasting yourself,
you too might let the dogs go

against air,
horseflesh,
the run of the arrow.

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2
And you might wonder,

having hauled down
so much of something new,
gutted and cut up and stinking in the fire,
by what four-legged power does a god move? —

You, who on hands and knees
have imagined the animal,
hooted and tied blind in the dark,
ridden the buffalo back from death,

eaten dogs as dogs eat,
and now this tall one,
this tall dog. . . .

3
And the next one?
Would you get down on all fours
and paw
at your shadow?
Would you run with dogs?
Would you have two legs and land
like an island around you?

Imagine you have taken this flesh into your own,
have arranged the bones,
have waited.

And thought there could be no two of this one.
That you should starve and sleep with dogs
and the next day rise as you were
and rise the day after that
to look again for water,

to find in each step the weight of the next
and the next until you are followed
or standing still,
this footpath of your fathers.

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4
Then see one, again,
at evening, in half light,
still looking like itself
but lying down,
without legs or size,
the head too small and turning,
slightly adrift the body —
after three days as if in search,
two dogs dead,
two feet, two legs. . . .

And rest.
And know that come morning
you will kill what is left of the dogs
and follow it and run with it
until it lies down again

5
and tie its four legs together
or later let it stand tethered
and in all its silence not even touch it,
seeing it is only what it is,

and you with nothing with you
but yourself
and the dry hunger of the miles since the first one
stood as in sleep
or so alone it seemed born that moment,
in that place,

and that you will rise from your body
as from the ground
onto this other, second of itself, horse
and rider.

Stanley Plumly

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George Levine

OUR CULTURE AND OUR CONVICTIONS

The profession of literature has a bad conscience. Or perhaps it is only a bad case of the jitters. However one identifies it, it is not altogether a bad thing, because it is forcing in many places a freshly serious (sometimes solemn, sometimes hysterical) consideration of what it means to "profess" literature; and it is making most of the earlier answers to that question seem wholly inadequate. Professing literature, in the sense I am using it, does not of course mean writing literature, but writing about it — an altogether more solemn and dubious thing. Novelists have only to write novels. Critics have to justify them. Under such circumstances, consciences are likely to be very tender and to make very great demands. Under such pressure, literature can become a coherent field of knowledge to be systematically studied, or a means to personal and social salvation, or, at very least, a mark of the superior civilized man.

Yet no matter how the claims of criticism escalate, it is difficult not to sound cynical discussing a profession so radically uncertain of itself even while the majority continue to express confidence about their function. Many critics and scholars are by now in academia, ostensibly earning their wages by teaching, their dignity by contributions to knowledge or to speculation. One finds, consequently, that perhaps the most bitterly cynical antiacademics are in the academy. Yet most of them want to believe or, at one time or another, have believed that the profession is itself vitally important. This condition is well known and several decades old; something new has been added in the past five or six years to provoke what is now almost a crisis of faith and vocation. Until recently, the bad conscience was only latent because those of us who "professed" — however much we might have patronized Arnold — believed ourselves to be saving the best that had been thought

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and said in Western civilization from the depredations of a philistine culture. Our politics were — where they existed — continuous with our vocation, that is, liberal. We saw no inconsistency in, on the one hand, insisting on the specialness of literary values, literary criteria, literary methods, and, on the other, writing amateur essays of social criticism circling more or less vaguely about classic literary texts.

The crisis of conscience is, then, an aspect of the crisis of liberalism. Many of us awoke one day to discover either that we were not in fact liberals or that liberalism itself had turned out to be badly wanting. The inherent inconsistencies of the profession had been forced into the open by what may well seem to be the bad luck of its engagement with teaching. Few teachers in American universities escaped at least temporary dislocation as a result of the activities of students and institutions in relation to the war in Viet Nam. Even the overwhelmingly dull Modern Language Association needed to come to terms — more or less — with the problem of social relevance, and much of the activity of that group over the last few years has had the quality of comic (or farcical) opera. I can personally bear witness to a good many meetings and a good many cocktail parties gone sour in a bewhiskeyed haze of passionate indignation. Guilt and bad conscience are a function of fear, and all of us are threatened — either by doubt about what we are doing or by visions of hordes of passionately intense people corrupting the dispassionate pursuit of knowledge. Yet who could have remained entirely untouched by the revelation that awarding a low grade could be the equivalent of pronouncing a death sentence, or by the experience of teaching *Benito Cereno* or even *Othello* to a class full of newly conscious Black students? It is hard, in such circumstances, not to begin asking questions about the importance to humanity of getting straight the language of the best creative minds of the West. These minds, we became freshly aware, were full of the prejudices of their culture, and by virtue of their power of language disseminated those prejudices powerfully. Were we, in the pursuit of scholarly truth and contributions to knowledge, implicated in the disasters of our culture?

Academic liberalism was put to the test in two equally difficult ways. We were forced to face the consequences of our humanitarian position, to consider the continuity between our lives as professionals, the systems which gave us our bread and our responsibility to act out our beliefs. We were forced, also, to consider our students in a new way, to stop lecturing and start talking, to experiment with the classroom in ways that should have worked but only rarely did. So academics went out on strike, demonstrated, joined in student organiza-

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tions or were sickened by guilt at not doing so. Yet we were too liberal, too sophisticated, to believe wholly in anything we did, and struggled to make sense of those Yeatsian lines which had become the profession's justification in the fifties: "The best lack all conviction, and the worst are full of passionate intensity."

Academics, as we should have known, turned out to be wonderfully incompetent politicians and remarkably uneducated about what education is. Bad consciences are inadequate weapons either for reform or revolution, and much of the political and pedagogical argument that has been going on about the relation of literature to society, of teaching to the student, of politics to all of this, has been sadly oversimple. It is still difficult to believe that studying literature with a high sense of political and moral relevance can matter at all in the reshaping of consciousness and behavior that obviously needs to be carried out. Nor is it easy to get comfortable with the politicization of the classroom or its transformation into group therapy or consciousness raising. But self-consciously to return to the old comforts of the liberal verities is to court catastrophe. We all, I think, can use a sharp reconsideration of the nature of the profession, of what it means to do criticism in the context of a society that insists on making such activity either trivial or difficult or both, and under the auspices of institutions which — whether they be journals, publishers or universities — are fully involved in all those extraliterary businesses which give us our bad conscience.

All three of the books I want to talk about here are evidence that such a reconsideration is the concern of a wide range of critics and scholars.[1] It is remarkable that within six months these three self–consciously important books on the subject should have been published by critics who have made their reputations in other ways, and all of whom live outside the United States. It would not be quite fair to say that all three are expressions of the bad conscience I have been discussing: none but Steiner begins to admit to the feeling. But if they are not the direct product of conscience, then they are surely a response to the pervasive threat to the business of criticism as we know it. And it is interesting to note how important Arnold's presence is to each, how persistently each

[1]THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF MODERN LITERATURE. By Malcolm Bradbury. Schocken. $9.00. THE CRITICAL PATH: AN ESSAY ON THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF LITERARY CRITICISM. By Northrop Frye. Indiana. $4.95. IN BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE: TOWARD THE REDEFINITION OF CULTURE [The 1971 T.S. Eliot Lectures]. By George Steiner. Yale. $5.95.

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formulation evokes an older, perhaps dying sense of literary vocation.

But the sense of discomfort with literary things as they are is everywhere visible. Bradbury, in the midst of a sensible analysis of some of the pressure leading to the breakdown of the old hierarchical literary culture, quietly laments that now "equality is more fashionable than excellence." Although the main point of Bradbury's book is the importance of seeing literature in a sociological context, he not only fails to take into account the fact and the reason that Arnold has become a villain to the New Left, but he takes up a position which reinforces the older notion of the special and separate existence of literature: "the only real commitment that good art can have finally is to art itself. Writers, of course, may commit themselves politically; but their literary motivation must, if they are serious writers, finally predominate over their political one when it comes to a declaration of interest. This, to come back to Matthew Arnold's word, is 'disinterestedness.' "

This kind of argument recalls directly the battle cry of "relevance" with which we have all been forced to deal in the past years. Frye's book is in large measure a direct attack on the idea that "relevance" can be anything but dangerous for the critic of literature. His tone is frequently tough, even angry, old-fashioned in its defense of rigor: "For a closed myth of concern, the question of relevance could hardly be easier to answer: anything is relevant that is relevant to it. It is equally easy to apply. For this kind of relevance relates the subject to the student: the slithering downward way of mindless educators, not the flinty uphill path of relating the student to the subject, which is the way of genuine education. For the myth of freedom, no built-in inherent relevance exists in any subject: only the student himself can establish the relevance of what he studies, and being a student means accepting the responsibility for doing so. To make such a commitment in the midst of the confusion of our time is an act of historical significance, civilization being the sane man's burden." That Frye can adopt such a phrase for his own purposes suggests, perhaps, something other than self-consciousness. At any rate, he stands in a very Victorian way beside Matthew Arnold, defending culture against dogmatists and skeptics alike. The quality of certainty in the rhetoric is a quality of dogma as well, a dogma hardened against the experience of doubt while insisting on doubt and asserting unequivocally the moral superiority of the guardians of culture over the questioners of it.

Steiner is, of course, more hip than Frye, and his relation to the tradition of Arnold is, therefore, more problematic. He is the only one of the three writers who allows himself to formulate directly the kinds

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of questions that have led the profession to its crisis of conscience: "What good did humanism do the oppressed mass of the community? What use was it when barbarism came? What immortal poem has ever stopped or mitigated terror — though a number have celebrated it? And, more searchingly: do those for whom a great poem, a philosophic design, a theorem, are, in the final reckoning, the supreme value, not help the throwers of napalm by looking away, by cultivating in themselves a stance of 'objective sadness' or historical relativism?" His answer is, in part, that the old terms of high culture were in fact supported, first by aristocratic, then by bourgeois and bureaucratic power structures. Because he seems to be taking greater risks, Steiner's language flirts with melodrama (where it isn't overpoweringly sophisticated), and I suppose it is true that had he found a more convincing language, his argument would have carried more weight. Yet the intensity of the English reaction to Steiner's book almost brings me around to sympathy for it. Who ever thought, the argument goes, that literature ever had anything to do with goodness? Why is Steiner making such a fuss when all of us literary sophisticates know that literature has a checkered moral history? And why should one think that there is any special or new discontinuity between literature and political action these days than there has always been? This response, too, however sensible it may seem with the vision of hindsight, is a reflex of that threat to the profession we have been discussing. At least Steiner doesn't retreat from that.

Or not quite. Unfortunately, he crawls out the other end by some obscure magic and comes to reassert a new high culture. If literary humanism is dead, Steiner returns extraordinarily to a new culture which will be defined in nonverbal activity — by mastery of music and mathematics. In the last section of his book, he moves not quite tentatively backwards into the old faith, ignoring all the emotional ambivalences he has played with to that point: "mental inquiry must move forward." And the book closes with an implicit allegiance to the ideals of Arnold and the activities of Dr. Frankenstein.

It is not quite fair to suggest that Steiner and Bradbury propose anything but the most tentative kinds of solutions to the problems. Only Frye speaks with clerkly confidence of the path the critic must take. Yet all three write what are in fact, if not in assertion, deeply personal defenses of poetry, and all three feel themselves attacked by the same forces — the democratization of culture, the demand for social relevance, the threat of traditional standards of excellence, the questionings of the value of high culture.

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Few of us seriously engaged with literature are capable either of ignoring or of dealing adequately with these attacks. Whether critics like it or not, their preoccupation with literature makes of them an elite, and membership is essentially alienating. This is a tired formulation, but it is important here because the best of our critics (and some of the worst) are struggling to avoid the implications of the specialness of their activity. One typical contemporary response — though not one acceptable to Frye, Bradbury or Steiner — is to accept a kind of cynical despair and admit that literature is simply a particularly sophisticated kind of pleasure and that criticism of it can therefore have meaning only for sophisticated epicureans. Concern for literature then becomes something altogether separate from political or social concern, and the critic accepts schizophrenia of the sort evident in William Morris's highly expensive art and highly socialist politics.

Frye, whose earlier criticism had left him vulnerable to attack as a man who insulated literature from social concern, has evidently felt the pressure to make clear what he has meant all along in insisting on the specially insulated nature of literature and literary study. His argument in *The Critical Path* is, therefore, worth following in some detail. It represents a highly systematic and apparently logical exploration of the relation of criticism to society. I find it particularly instructive because it resolves itself into an unacknowledged paradox in which the path can be seen either as a dead end or a large circle, a characteristic impasse.

As one would expect, Frye's analysis is largely concerned with the historical development of myths. In the beginning, says Frye, the poet was the spokesman for his culture, and he articulated the myths "that it most concerns" his "society to know." He calls these "myths of concern." "The myth of concern," he says, "exists to hold society together, so far as words can do this. For it, truth or reality are not directly connected with reasoning or evidence, but are socially established. What is true, for concern, is what society does and believes in response to authority, and a belief, so far as belief is verbalized, is a statement of willingness to participate in a myth of concern." This myth went to make poetry deeply traditional, and the poet lived at the very center of society as a transmitter of tradition and spokesman for its highest ideals. The apple enters the garden, however, as oral culture is transformed into writing culture, and truth is seen not in terms of authority but in terms of "correspondence, the alignment of a structure of words or numbers with a body of external phenomena." Empiricism introduces the "myth of freedom": "The myth of freedom is

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part of the myth of concern, but is a part that stresses the importance of the non-mythical elements in culture, of the truths and realities that are studied rather than created, provided by nature rather than by a social vision."

In Frye's literary terms, the tension between myths of freedom and concern accounts for the history of Western culture, and he offers us a stunningly clever history. But what concerns us directly here is his notion of the role of the critic and poet in this history. With the development of a writing culture, the poet's position becomes less central, and others must transmit the myth of concern directly. Poetry becomes more private and loses its power to articulate wide social aims and attitudes: "Those who express the ideas and symbols that hold society together are no longer the poets; they are rather men of action with power over the sententious utterance, operating mainly outside literature." And although the Romantics reasserted the mythic aspect of literature, poetic dealings with myth tended in fact to be subversive and primitive, an assertion of human value against the inhuman forces of society. The critic, then, assumes a major role as interpreter.

This role, most powerfully asserted, according to Frye, in the Renaissance, reached its last full expression in Matthew Arnold. The humanist critic "was in a superior position to the poet, not personally or socially, but as the spokesman for the society which established the norms to which the poet conformed." The critic, in effect, became society's arbiter, and himself belonged to a select "community of scholars, orators and intellectuals." Arnold, of course, became the great spokesman for Culture which, "by articulating right reason and developing the best self, creates within society an inner elect group which mediates the ideals of society." It rejects extremes and partisanship of any kind for the sake of correct and universal standards. It judges and interprets literature with a view to locating and valuing that which transcends the limits of class and self-interest.

But Frye does not allow himself or modern critics to stand with Arnold because, as he says, the democratization of literature and society makes the elitist terms of Arnold's criticism impossible. "The mediating society which provides the norms for judging and evaluating literature has gone, and consequently each judicial critic can speak only for himself." And here we reach what is distinctive in Frye's position. His antagonism to judicial criticism is already well known, but it has rarely been articulated with such dogmatic energy: "Once the critic is released from the preoccupation of a moral and evaluating approach, he is obliged to preserve a tolerance for every variety of poetic expression and a respect for every poet's individuality. Such a phrase as 'of course,

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I don't like this *kind* of poetry' can never be uttered by a serious critic." The critic's obligation is to see literature as a body of knowledge which can be studied systematically, and as critic he must free himself from all merely personal responses. The reason for this is clear: Arnold's kind of arbitrative disinterestedness has failed, and we must find a higher disinterestedness transcending the limits of any concerned segment of society (Arnold, ultimately, represented only one concerned group). One needs to stand outside of concern altogether, committed only to the truth of correspondence *and* to literature.

This rather transcendentalizes Arnold's position. Since literature can mean anything, it really means everything: "Everyone deeply devoted to literature knows that it says something, and says something as a whole, not only in its individual works." At the risk of being charged with less than devotion (such charges are the center of Frye's rhetoric), I profess that I did not know that literature said something as a whole. In any case, Frye goes on to what is surely almost visionary: "In turning from formulated belief to imagination we get glimpses of a concern behind concern, of intuitions of human nature and destiny that have inspired the great religious and revolutionary movements of history." Literature then becomes the one true church of the humanist skeptic, and worship in it is "study," the interpretation of the scrolls. The modern critic thus becomes again a part of the saving remnant. He is "a student of mythology, and his total subject embraces not merely literature, but the areas of concern which the mythical language of construction and belief enters and informs. These areas constitute the mythological subjects, and they include large parts of religion, philosophy, political theory, and the social sciences."

Frye's theorizing returns us to Arnold's impossible situation. The ideal of Platonic contemplation and Arnoldian disinterestedness now becomes the only ideal which will lead us back into history. We are asked to retain our sense of history, to understand how myths of concern can lead to exclusion and narrowing and, in political terms, repression; how myths of freedom can lead to an ahistoricism as damaging as the oppression because it dooms the myths to become themselves exclusive and intolerant. In fact, Frye gives us a brilliant, almost mystical articulation of the modern liberal's position, and with precisely the sort of dogmatic innocence we have seen in the response of many academic liberals to the threat of student insurrection. We must study history by standing outside of it, but Frye surely stands too far above the various concerned contenders for power. He manages an extraordinarily brilliant and bloodless history of Western civilization in literary terms and

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sustains an aloofness to all its ideals but the ideal of tolerance, rejection of which makes him utterly intolerant himself. His own position is undercut either way one looks at it. If he does manage that total tolerance he aspires to, he is subject to his own critique of the too tolerant: "those who do not wish to exclude anything run the risk of losing their identity and having their total inclusiveness turn into its terrible opposite, the sense of a totally meaningless universe." Democracy, he says, is the only practicable solution to the problem of contending value systems. It accepts, "as part of a permanent tension between concern and freedom, a plurality of myths of concern, in which the state assumes the responsibility of keeping the peace among them." The state, then, is without identity — a totally negative conception of the kind Mann implies in "Mario and the Magician." But though Frye's argument remains at the level of the ideal, one cannot fail to see that the state is never dispassionate, must itself be preoccupied with its own power. Neither Frye nor the state can be altogether reliable arbiters between contending myths.

It is preoccupation with the ideal that injures Frye's argument, for it lacks a sense of the reality of human motives and activities, governed not by strange mythic powers, intellectual ideals, feelings in a vacuum, but by complicated and unsystematic structures of human relation, greed, lusts for power, love, self-deception, psychoses, neuroses, hungers, hopes, pains, etc. The ideal prevents Frye from dealing with some of the facts of the present crisis — that, for instance, the disinterestedness and tolerance in the liberal humane tradition have been invoked regularly to keep power for those who have it and to reject those who do not; that the study of literature as a system of knowledge is the privilege of an elite; that this study, in doing violence to the personal response, does violence to literature itself; that the dispassionate study of science (and here, I know, I verge on Ludditism) has terrifying moral consequences; and that disinterestedness is only an ideal and not a full human possibility.

At his worst, then, Frye sometimes looks like an intelligent Mr. Casaubon, seeking his key to all mythologies. But he understands much of the criticism I have been making, and it would be fairest to allow him the formulation:

> Preserving a myth of freedom along with a myth of concern in society is difficult and dangerous, for while a society with an open mythology is obviously better for human life than a society with a closed one, yet an open mythology is by no means a panacea. Not only is there a constant pressure within society to close its

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> mythology from both radical and conservative wings, but the efforts to keep it open have to be strenuous, constant, delicate, unpopular, and above all largely negative. When it comes to meeting the threat to identity, a myth of freedom seems very ineffective in comparison with the narcotic charm of a closed myth of concern, with its instant, convinced and final answers. It takes time to realize that these answers are not only not genuine answers, but that only the questions can be genuine, and all such answers cheat us out of our real birthright, which is the right to ask the questions.

Seeing the price of liberalism, Frye is prepared to suffer the martyrdom of defending it. As a professor, he has already had to do battle, and the immediate form of it is in the attempt to preserve the university, which he sees as the "engine room" of liberal ideas of education, the place where the "appeal to reason, experiment, evidence and imagination is constantly going on. It is not and never can be a concerned organization, like a church or a political party, and the tactics of trying to revolutionize society by harassing and bedevilling the university are not serious tactics." Here is the immediate threat and the immediate response. Ourselves wanting so much to believe this and to be protected (powerless in a way not to believe it), we are in danger of adopting the sort of moral stance which will allow us to turn indignantly away from the passionately intense who have no interest in our kind of disinterest. The university may in fact be the place where reason and the will of God are most fully explored and prevalent, but we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that it is in practice a concerned organization, that it fulfills immediate social needs which, were they eliminated, would virtually wipe it out; and those disinterested contemplators within it must learn to understand precisely how disinterested it is. At any rate, it is a problematic sort of institution at the moment for which to undertake martyrdom.

Bradbury, too, is concerned with the problems that arise from the democratization of culture and with the place of literature in its larger social context. But despite a good deal of theorizing, his book is less theoretical — at least less preoccupied with the ideal — than Frye's. It belongs in the good solid tradition of English empiricism, and is an attempt to make and prove an argument on a much smaller scale — simply, that the study of literature from a sociological perspective can be an extremely useful enterprise, can, in fact, help illuminate particular texts in ways unavailable to "timeless" analyses. Bradbury sees literature as embedded in social contexts (although he is distinctly *not* Marxist in orientation), as used for a wide variety of purposes, as aimed

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at different audiences. He is not interested in justifying the role of the critic, but in modifying it to bring it more closely into touch with contemporary problems and perceptions. The artist has an important role; literature is a mode of knowing; the critic should know something about sociology to understand fully the artist's role, his difficulties, his texts.

Much of the book is devoted to analyses of the shifts in the state of culture in England during the past hundred years, and to the impact of these shifts on the artist's relation to his society. Although an impressive range of sociological reading is brought to bear on the subject, the conclusions are not startlingly fresh. In ways that confirm some of Frye's arguments, Bradbury sees the writer as having moved increasingly far from the center of his culture. Where the Victorians, even while protesting loudest, spoke with "a real sense of functioning close to the centre of society," the moderns have been forced to adopt more private voices as they move more deeply into isolation, and to question the nature of their own literary activity — to make of art its own subject. The details of this discussion are more useful than the commonplace quality of the large conclusions would suggest. But what I find most interesting is the recurrent feeling of loss at the falling away from centrality, at the diminution of the tradition of liberal humanism, of educating and civilizing. Imagining for the artist the possibility of recapturing this old role, Bradbury tends to admire the struggles of a good many ordinary writers to sustain the traditions of Victorian realism against the onslaught of modernism.

Without anger, Bradbury laments the loss of rigorous standards; but he remains too confidently or aspiringly central and Arnoldian to be of much use in the present crisis of conscience which Frye more directly confronts. Bradbury recognizes an "erosion of the centrally human aspect of art, sees mass society as one in which "no one accepts responsibility for values, and in which genuine cultural bonds are weakened progressively while nothing worthy and binding is put in their place." Where Frye rejects Arnoldian centrality because it is in fact "interested," Bradbury seeks it. His book, in general, feels much closer to the experience of art than Frye's, partly because it is less theoretical. At any rate, he is willing to accept incoherences. He sees, for example, that his abstract arguments should suggest that modern literature is barely possible, but takes pains to pronounce a judgment that the twentieth century is a great age of literature. The great modern writers have managed somehow to continue the tradition whose loss he laments, to provide something "like a conservative literary perspective on modern experience," "a vision of their culture." Bradbury is content, in other

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words, to live with difficulties in understanding and coping with contemporary culture, and to seek understanding not in systematic discussions of culture, but in art itself. The critic's function is to study literature in the context and as an expression of its culture, to read it scrupulously in its own terms because those terms are at once its special quality and the fullest articulation of the experience of a culture. Thus literature still bears the cultural burden, if not mythologically — as for Frye — then mimetically. Though he sees that fundamental questions about the nature of literature are being asked, Bradbury's only answer to them is to modify critical approaches to take in sociology. The writer is to struggle to provide for his art not only "form and insight into modern experience," but "meaningful existence." Sensibly enough, Bradbury leaves the writer to the struggle. Holding to Arnoldian values, Bradbury yet leaves the critic to examine what the artist has done with his struggle.

If Frye works to transcendental Arnoldianism and Bradbury only to a more gently modified version of it, Steiner seems for a while determined to destroy it or prove that it has been destroyed. In the course of their arguments — as would any defenders of essentially liberal ideology — Frye and Bradbury have to construct histories. Frye's is the history of conflicting mythologies, Bradbury's of more specific changes within a more historically confined period. But both see history as essential, survival depending on our awareness of the past either to explain or protect us from the present; and the critic is responsible for making the past available. But for Steiner history is apocalypse, and the past is dead to most of us — we cannot even read "Lycidas." The present is, in a critically inhuman way, altogether new. The past is a myth which we use as a crutch. But Steiner's history itself turns out to be a kind of poetic fiction, though not thoroughly unconvincing. It leaps about among symbolic crises. The Napoleonic Wars mark a transformation in Western sensibility: they "brought on an overwhelming immanence, a deep emotionally stressed change in the quality of hope," a new sense of time and possibility. The political reaction which followed, amidst great industrial and urban development, produced a new kind of feeling, "ennui," and a new yearning, "the nostalgia for disaster" which climaxed in the Nazi death camps.

The audacity (if not the high seriousness) of this kind of writing is disguised by the certainty of tone, the breadth of allusion, the personal command of Steiner's prose, which almost survives its own worst lapses into pseudoscientific jargon and vast abstractions. It is prose

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aspiring to be poetry or something better suited to deal with the ultimate disaster of Nazi Germany — a disaster to which the human imagination is not equal. This is Steiner's mythology. It cares very little for the details of historical movements because it is really a record of a sensibility reading modern experience as if it were literature — though maybe bad literature. Not being an historian myself, I confess to enjoying such history, even to finding in it some of my own less sophisticated mythology (though I do protest against a later Steinerian history which sees the Nazi murder of Jews as the final revenge of the West for the introduction of the moral rigors of monotheism). The problem really is that Steiner is concerned with problems far too important to have them dismissed on the grounds of his historical vagueness and unspecificity. One may finally be angry that such matters had to find expression in this form, to carry the weight of Steiner's personal vision. But we can allow ourselves that anger only after considering the form itself, the terms on which Steiner offers his apocalytic mythology.

In effect, he is only stating a peculiarly sophisticated and occasionally irritating version of a widely shared attitude — a perhaps illiberal and unhistorical sense that we are living in the center of a unique catastrophe. The crisis of conscience I have been discussing is surely, in part, a reflection of the widespread sense that literature and criticism are mere fiddling while the world is burning. Whether these are really special times or not, they feel special: the old values have been challenged and found wanting; social structures, political alignments have been permanently shattered. The profession feels the threat. So does Steiner. He has never (and perhaps rightly) allowed himself to get over his knowledge of the experience of Nazi Germany. The apocalypse is there for him, though for a younger generation it has come elsewhere. In the face of this, he asks: "How is one to address oneself, without a persistent feeling of fatuity, even of indecency, to the theme of ultimate inhumanity?" He risks both fatuity and indecency, and for this at least he deserves respect. It is something no good Englishman or academic would do.

As a member of the profession, he has had to ask himself, therefore, what relation literature, the humanities, the whole liberal humane tradition has had to this inhumanity. He decides that "the barbarism which we have undergone reflects, at numerous and precise points, the culture which it sprang from and set out to desecrate. Art, intellectual pursuits, the development of the natural sciences, many branches of scholarship flourished in close spatial, temporal proximity to massacre

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and the death camps." Steiner comes to believe what many of us have been forced to face on a much less apocalyptic scale during the last few years, that the "humanistic traditions" not only proved a "frail barrier against political bestiality," but that they in some ways "express solicitation of authoritarian rule and cruelty." We may feel comfortable in replying that this is all too easy, that so unpolitical a bunch as humanists could hardly be expected to provide a strong barrier, and that, in any case, it is absurd to cast such severe blame on that tradition when there are so many more obvious, direct and powerful forces implicated. But if we are to have such brilliant humanists as Frye and Steiner providing analyses of culture, we do have a right to ask questions about the political realities of the traditions these analyses represent. If humanists are directly implicated in these inhumanities, they should either stop writing about culture or stop making such high moral claims for their profession, or both.

The Nazi death camps were, according to Steiner, no accident, but the properly consistent and symbolic outcome of the major developments of Western culture. The details of Steiner's indictment of this culture constitute the second of these T. S. Eliot lectures, but I leave the precise counterarguments (many of which are obvious) to others. I prefer rather to stay with the major intuition, which I find largely convincing, that there is not only no apparent connection between moral humanity and the practice of the humanities (cynics will repeat: "Who ever thought there was?"), but that the humanities are seriously implicated in the worst as well as in the best of Western civilization.

Steiner provokes melodrama. But let us see where this intuition takes him. For one thing, it forces him to break out of the provincialism of Western civilization with which every child is imbued before high school. Humanists are used to reading past — or excusing historically — the xenophobia of Western literature, its resentment and fear of Blacks, Jews and Asians. It is more difficult to do this in classrooms full of aliens with the pressure of Viet Nam and Nazi Germany at one's back. And in the long run, this xenophobia is not peripheral but central to Western art. "For the great majority of thinking beings," Steiner says, "certainly for the young, the image of Western culture as self-evidently superior, as embodying within itself almost the sum total of intellectual and moral power, is either a racially-tinged absurdity or a museum-piece."

But this account of Steiner's views does not do justice to his quite sensible awareness of the futility of Western guilt. This awareness, however, is mixed with another, a contradictory and telltale element: a

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final acceptance of the eminence of Western culture in the sciences and the arts. He, therefore, rejects the guilt which forces us to "soil that legacy" (a touch of aesthetic revulsion which, in view of his previous arguments of the implications of that legacy in the death camps, is quite striking). The book turns around and becomes almost a model of Western superiority — both to other cultures and to those within it who either deny it or are unequal to its achievements. And as this reversal takes place, Steiner can make quite sensible arguments serve purposes utterly alien to the mood and texture of the first part of his book. He insists, for instance, on the Westerner's incapacity to be anything but Western (fair enough), and regards the Western "gurus and publicists . . . who profess to be brothers under the skin with the roused vengeful soul of Asia and Africa" (caricature and melodrama take over) as "living a rhetorical lie." The moral indignation of this final cliché is directed, whether Steiner likes it or not, at the people who have, however erratically, attempted to follow out the consequences of his own awareness of provincialism. And this rhethoric finds its place where the immediate threat to the profession, to the teacher and critic rejecting the cries of "relevance," is most direct.

Steiner is not, at least, asking the impossible — that the West reject its past. Yet in turning to the art of the possible, he turns to the tradition of Arnold once more. He asks for what the liberal humanist tradition has always wanted — a sense of history, the preservation of the great texts: "if we are to understand where, in political and social terms, the classic past went wrong, we must not only acknowledge the incomprehensible human creativity of that past, but also our enduring, though problematic, links with it." But at the moment, at least, "the confident centre is . . . unrecapturable."

That cultural center which Frye would capture with his disinterested study of literature, which is mythology, is not available to Steiner. Yet with all his evaluative energy, with all the excess of his formulations and interestedness of study, Steiner finally goes over to Frye's camp. He is no Luddite, distrusting science and knowledge because it has previously led to catastrophe: his faith, finally, is in knowledge alone, and in the continuing eminence of Western culture. He differs from Frye in not being content with the study of the past; he wants to construct a new culture to lead us out of the present Hell, though without any hope of Utopia, or even of a sense of Utopia (which Frye has), to provide norms.

Having begun poetically, Steiner is free to end poetically. He wants a good tragic vision, and finds one. Not for a moment will he

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consider the sacrifice of the culture he loves and which is his burden (about which this book is an expression of the guilt he tells us it is useless and dangerous to feel). Why labor to transmit culture? Because, as he says, "We are hunters after reality." We must endure the risks of thought. Poetically, Steiner returns to where he began. It is Western nature to be what it is, and we must therefore be what we are. We can only hope that by pursuing new lines of culture, understanding nonverbal culture like music and mathematics, we can bring ourselves through and out of our present Hell.

This is at least as unsatisfying as Frye's disengagement, and more infuriating because it pretends to be dealing directly and originally with real contemporary problems. Steiner is, however, an aesthetic moralist (with a touch of fatalism), and he has needed to reconcile his love of art and high culture with his hatred of the scrubbiness and nastiness of its social context — a context which is for him as a Jew particularly obvious in its personal threat. Unfortunately, the tone he adopts is heavy with the overtones of aesthetic and cultural superiority, cleverness, hipness. Given the solemnity of his subject it is unfortunate, as well, that he should be so casually triumphant in his massive generalizations, even where they assert the need for tentativeness. There is, I suspect, something less than candor in his ultimate fatalism. If the West cannot stop being the West, a professor cannot stop his professing; that is his nature too. Steiner has a deeply personal stake in high culture; yet if he can see with the intensity with which he professes to see, surely he, and all of us other professors, might stop. Minimally, it seems, he should be doing something other than temporizing with necessity.

Much of the problem with these reconsiderations of the liberal tradition, of the place of literature in society, of the history of our culture is that they persist — where they provide serious suggestions at all — in remaining at very high levels of abstraction, in seeing things whole (as Arnold might say). They struggle for some ultimate coherence against contemporary fragmentation. None of them can sacrifice for a moment faith in the importance to society of the humane tradition of literary culture, and none is willing to accept the diminution of his own role as spokesman for that tradition. Grandiosities of rhetoric support a sense of importance even where the direct meaning of the language expresses awareness of the lapse from the cultural center. All three writers are correct in seeing no easy solutions to the problems they pose or elude, but none imagines, in the particularities of his

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experience as "professor," a genuinely problematic or eccentric role. In different ways, these books are all apologies for the way things are in high culture.

Frye makes a sharp distinction between the critic as person and the critic as critic. As a person, he is free to be engaged, to value, to judge; as a critic he must avoid engagement at all costs. Bradbury sees the writer's cultural isolation as something with which to struggle, and his role to be that of the historian of our culture. Steiner seems unwilling to allow the separation of man and critic, man and writer, and insists that the transmission of our culture demands engagement; but he surrenders to the risk of the inseparability of writer and man. Together they urge the pursuit of knowledge; separately they deal with what they take to be the real moral relation of the humanist to his culture.

There is much to be disentangled here, and I frankly cannot imagine how it is to be done. But surely we can avoid the sort of dualisms that must result from grandiose and aspiringly comprehensive visions of literature and culture. We need not choose between accepting or rejecting Western culture but might, less ambitiously, think rather more of specific expressions of it and learn to become less complacent about the provincialism we are likely to discover. We need not choose between scholarly objectivity and detachment on the one hand, constricting personal engagement, subjectivity, intuition on the other. Instead, we might recognize the interestedness of our disinterest, and, with as much respect for the literature as we can develop, allow our engagement to color our reading (it will do so, more dangerously, anyway). We will make fewer pretenses about contributions to knowledge in this way, but we are likely to make criticism, if not literature, more creative and insightful. Only the corpse of literature is a body of knowledge. And we need not choose between continuing the "eternal quest for knowledge" and a new Ludditism. What we can do is ask ourselves much more serious questions about the consequences of our quest on each particular occasion of it. Much of the shock to the profession in the last decade or so has come from the revelation that dispassionate quests for truth, even about literature, have social and moral consequences that seemed not at all related to those truths. We must, surely, unburden ourselves of the high moral sense of vocation (which is sometimes an equivalently snobbish high aesthetic sense). Taking it all so seriously is one of the sure ways to bring culture around to strange political allegiances.

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STORIES

Ed Leffingwell

FIREWORKS!

From PAPER HIGHWAY

A copy of the edition of Trotsky's *Permanent Revolution* set in type in Havana and then suppressed during the first printing, was open and face down on a reading chair. File cabinets indexed to an alphabet of political data occupied the far corner. The alphabet began with XYZ. Rafael came into the room and stood beside Django, impressive in his physical strength, and calm. Django recalled how much the diocesan candlemaker resembled the late Ernesto Guevara — very much — and then dismissed the thought. They smiled at each other, exchanging a military embrace, and went outside, suddenly mysterious allies. They began to drive to Parícutin.

The mountain village was tucked away from the rest of everything else. A large dusty arena served the town as commons and festival stage, backed up by a church. Chickens and burros roamed the square, harrassed by squads of militant children. Long-dugged mongrels roamed the dirt.

Into the innocence came the Ghia. Django pulled up on one side of the area and stopped in front of a cantina. There were no other cars around. He and Billy and Rafael got out and stretched in the Michoacán sun. Juanito, a cousin and a cripple, greeted Rafael and his friends.

He manipulated his body around on polished aluminum crutches and good humor. He was the village fireworks officer.

Most of the fingers on his left hand were abbreviated, maimed or missing.

High wooden fences and tall corn bordered the few lanes that

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gave a grid pattern to the town. The lanes, not intended much for cars, ruled out the chance of driving the Ghia much closer to the site of the ruined church.

The village was into preparations for the festival. The women wore black. One turned to look at Django. A corner of her ribosa was caught in her mouth and she held it there with blank and total concentration, in which there was some element that assured and disturbed him.

Sensitive beyond reason, Django felt that somehow all these people knew who they were and what they were there for, and although he was reasonably sure they'd do nothing to impede him, they wouldn't do much to help. Rafael wanted to play dominoes. Django wanted to get to the old church. The game was postponed on account of priority.

The three of them followed one lane through the village and beyond. After a mile or so, they reached a wooded area that fell away from the road at a fairly steep grade. From that vantage point, Rafael pointed to the heaps of volcanic lifelessness in the distance, grey and black, and he led the way down through the trees.

They walked along a stream, sometimes following a path, sometimes, feeling reckless and elated, bounding from rock to rock like mountain goats. Django felt good. The rocks and the moss of the wooded terrain again reminded him of Pennsylvania mountains, but toward the bottom where the trees thinned out and the land leveled, the terrain became a bit more formidable, a little less hospitable to the foot. Django noticed the first traces of volcanic deposit underfoot some time before Rafael pointed it out to him, and he was somewhere ahead of himself, already accosting the unfriendly landscape and mounting up to the church even before the ruin was fully visible.

And then he could see where the bells had been.

A little further on and the two remaining walls of the church were visible. The wall that had contained the entrance to the cathedral to the left, and to the right, the wall that held the altar, the business end of the church, the sacristy.

The twin sentinels of the ruin, awash with the rosy glow of a sunset that had set the western sky to burning in a scarlet sort of hemorrhage, soaked the entire landscape with a reflected color like the ghosts of geologic horror, reminiscent of the day Parícutin had

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finally lobbed up out of the hot disturbed cornfields, harvesting their deathcrop.

A few huts had been constructed near where the old village must have been. A little corn grew inside the wooden fences, and there were a few animals, some chickens. Two old nunlike women, white hair, ribosas and shawls and skirts all black, came to the door of a hut. Rafael waved to them and continued on.

They came to the foot of the hard rock mountain from which the ruined church protruded. Acres and acres of ground were bleak with the hardened flow and supported no life to speak of. "There weren't many farmers among the old villagers," Rafael began.

"One man, the story goes, was working his field for a long time, he notice the ground grow warm to his hand and get big like a pregnant woman. The cone had appear, a crater quarter mile across.

"So this old one measured the swelling with sticks. He made new marks, measured the progress of the mountain that would destroy him. And then one day. . . ."

As he continued the story, Django closed his eyes and put his hands to the ground, and let the pictures run on. He was the old man now, for days he had been marking the funny pregnant cornfield, chide it for an unwed mother, and when he pissed on the hot ground, would offer his body water to cool its fever. Then it happened, the earth split open and rose up beneath him with a sickening roar. The earth shifted and trembled beneath him again and he puked and shit his terror, and then in the violence the old man's horror was over as the liquid rock poured over him, searing his eyes with the great heat, finally covering him, burying him under new rock for all time.

"Jesus," said Django, opening his eyes. The sun was going down in a big way as they — Billy and Rafael — turned back to the village and left Django in the care of the old women to attend to his vigil. Django figured beauty for terror, imagined above a constellation of an olive tree when the stars began, and tried to will himself not to think. He looked back at the old women. Then he looked up at the foothills of cooled lava, the rivulets of vegetation, green among the bald scruffy rock, that split into the outer boundary of the flow. The night had come without dusk really, and then stars,

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everywhere. Behind him in the watchtower huts, lights had been struck to candles and receded as he climbed on to the rock island.

Undertaking the ascent in the early dark before the moonrise, he moved away from the candles, and the old women, and sometimes the climb up to the ruin was difficult, sometimes not. He stopped to rest. In a little while when the moon was up he extracted some of the Shasta crystal from his pocket and dipped in his index finger, snorted a bit, and then some more, until his head was clear.

He became aware of the skeletal structure of his body apparatus, of its musculature, and tissue. He became aware of the part of his mind he'd left behind, and it was like a door shut on a room full of words.

He waited and then continued the climb and was on a peak beside the sacristy wall of the church. Below him he could see where the altar had been.

He was sitting on a rounded cavity on a lava peak and he heard a sound and saw light. A flash of falcon, concentric blazes of red and yellow all around the bird and behind it. In a vision his flesh and hair burned white and a staircase appeared, a marble one in ruins with brilliant white flowers massed in the rubble at its base. He went over and laid down in the flowers and his pores were open to and soaked in citrus and musk.

Arrow, dressed in white, his hair white, and bearing the falcon, appeared, and then was gone. It grew lighter and there were mountains with snow on the peaks and a beautiful barren landscape, white houses and a white stone road. Then the light dimmed and it was dark with just the stars and moon and the vision had passed.

Django stood up and the bells were not in the belltower and had never been. There was something about hope that eluded him. In this pentecost Django became a master of nothing, and knowing choice, he felt the loneliness of some great bird pass through him dragging its brilliant train of crystal feathers. "Too much," he said. "I am alone and there is no wall."

On the morning of the seventh, after sunrise, Django came down the little fire-born mountain whistling, hands in his pockets. He managed the descent in skips and bounds, walked over to the vigil hut of the old women who already were preparing for the day's

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festival, loading big tubs of Orange Crush and beer and a transistor radio blaring, suspended from a tree. It's not irony but a poem, he thought, ripping open an Orange Crush on his belt buckle, juggling with it and then downing it with one breath. Over the bottle he could see Rafael and Billy coming toward him.

"Buenos dias," said his friends.

"Buenes Aires," said Django, grinning. Billy was dancing around to the loud honky border music on the radio, elated to see his buddy smiling. "Billy boy," said Django, "We're bound for Tafoarout. You ready?"

"Berber Bound," said Billy, and they each had a beer of agreement and headed back to the village, continuing. As they began the climb back up through the wooded area to the roadway and the village, they passed an odd procession of the beautiful and the damned heading in the opposite direction, toward the ruined church. In the lead was Juanito on horseback, smiling madly and singing to himself, aluminum crutches slung over the pommel like saddlebags. Strung out behind mounted on horses and burros were Magdalene and Birmingham and the Shastas and a host of the beautiful others, inappropriately dressed and late for an occasion that would never take place.

Billy pulled down his fly and whipped out his joint and pissed in front of the procession. Magdalene looked like he was going to have a coronary.

Django and Billy pounded each other, jumping and laughing and pointing at the caravan, and they turned to watch the ridiculous procession ride to a ruined church and a pile of volcanic garbage.

On the lane that opened and headed toward the village up above, they passed the old Packard limousine, stranded and straddling a ditch, an axle broken. All along the roadway they passed untidy relics of the opposition, and in the town they found, among other big dark cars and the Ghia, Rafael's vintage ambulance, Timberlake, John David, Sylvie and the kids, and Juanito rejoined them. Waving crutches in the air and riding at full gallop, he raced into the village, dismounted, and hopped to the church and the fireworks. As the first explosion detonated, Rafael pulled out some mescal and the men stood around the cantina, drinking out of the bottle, smacking their lips, watching the fireworks and their women and the children at play.

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The reserve the villagers had offered Django at first was gone, and the celebrants adopted him. He thought of the ranks of the opposition climbing around Paricutin, waiting, uncomfortable in the hot sun, perhaps with parasols for shade, sweating out the day on Orange Crush and beer, watching and waiting for something, and altogether too late.

Three masked riders with silk ribbons and mirrors waving wooden swords came swooping into the plaza from a side lane, on decorated horses, in ceremonies of horsemen the magic riders evoked the glad terror of catharsis for their people. As the fireworks pelted the clear sky with explosions of color and light, Juanito ruled the day and the bells rang, and Django understood why the people who survived had taken the bells from the old church and brought them to the church of the living.

In departing, Django and the Kid left John David with Christie and Timberlake. He wore plantation whites and a panama and stood on the steps of the big house.

"Hasta lumbego!" he cried to his liberators.

"Estados Unidas!" they replied.

"Unitas, you call us!" said Billy.

"Well Pancho?" asked Django.

"Si, Cisco. . . ."

"See you soon! Ha!" And they were off.

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Christina Stead

A NICE CAKE

Mrs. Anderson was very busy one Friday evening. She went to bed early, scurried about in the night and had a good deal to say to herself. When she was having her coffee at breakfast, she put her finger on a spot of coffee and remarked:

"Wet. Those who travel understand a lot. For example, I was told, a certain man told me, that *wet* in Dutch means law; *Wetstraat* means Law Street. Naturally, a man with a gift for languages. You're either born with it or you're not. However, you can talk for an hour and not say anything."

She continued disgustedly: "I prefer those who speak plain."

"Then you must speak plain and not in crossword puzzles," said her son Gilbert, laughing.

She spat fire. "Plain! Yes, it's very suitable for a plain old woman. I speak plainly — others do not."

Gilbert and his wife Nellie laughed. Said Mrs. Anderson:

"Very well, laugh. I know what I'm talking about."

"I know you do, but we don't," said Gilbert.

"You can judge a man by the way he treats old people. If a man has respect for old people, then he is a fine man. A man who never gives a thought to anyone but himself is either a miser or he's greedy. He never puts his hand in his pocket! A miser! An egotist! That's disgraceful for a young man, unmarried."

"What is the trouble, Mamma?" said Gilbert.

"Never mind, never mind," she said. She sat grieving. When asked to have more coffee, she said: "Never mind, not for me, not for the old." But later she took some.

When Gilbert went shopping, he said: "Is there anything you would like, Mamma?"

"Oh, don't trouble yourself, you're very kind," she said charmingly, making her little bow. Before he had made a step, she went up close and remarked sagely:

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"Old is old. We must not complain. There's nothing can be done about it. Arsenic cure in Rumania perhaps. Bogomolotz they said; but who knows? They advertise. I digest nothing. For example, sardines are greasy and hard to digest. Even the best — for example, Portuguese or French. They're dear, also they're just as indigestible. Then they smell out the icebox. What a pity! Who can eat a whole box? So much money thrown in the street, you might say. Of course, there is the taste, very good. I read in a medical magazine that doctors are beginning to discuss whether it is more than a question of calories and vitamins; there is taste, too. Why is taste given to us? There must be a reason. Nothing exists without a reason. Well, there you see, perhaps a nice-tasting sardine makes a nourishing sandwich."

"Well, I'll get some sardines, then."

"*Sardeenkee*, Gilbert, *sardeenkee*, do you know that is what the Russians say?"

"And what else, Mamma?"

"Oh, but Russian is such a pure language, no one, no foreigner could learn it. No, it is no use. It is too pure."

"Mamma!"

"Sardines, I am sorry to say, are a very good taste, but what is there to them? A bite and they're gone! It's not practical, my dear. The young cannot understand and it is better so. An old woman is better off taking oatmeal. Only it happens in my case that I cannot digest oatmeal. Besides, what is it but an excuse for taking milk and sugar? I would do better to take milk and sugar in my tea; and then the tea remains hot longer. At the same time, I prefer lemon tea — it's more delicate. They say eggs have come down; did you hear that? Of course, eggs are bad for the liver. I knew a woman, a lovely woman with twenty-seven rooms, she ran a boardinghouse and she never ate an egg. Oh, my dear, she had bright eyes, like stars! What is the reason for your remarkable health, Mrs. Saxon, I asked. We used to meet in the afternoons, in the park. I have a very poor liver, she told me; and my son, too. We never touch eggs. You can learn from everyone."

"Well, I'll get eggs," said Gilbert.

Standing there, in the same bright, touching and philosophical manner, Mrs. Anderson discussed the way to make omelettes (above

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all, a special pan, oiled but never washed, though she never touched oil), meatballs (a combination of veal and beef, finely chopped), string beans (bad for the liver); and she also mentioned several surgical cases she had heard of. There was a man, a native born citizen, who had his stomach removed and the large intestine joined to the esophagus and after walking bent double for eighteen months, he had been able to become a waiter in the Palace Hotel. Gilbert observed that he knew a literary man who remained a literary man after the same operation. Mrs. Anderson became worried. She said in a gloomy manner:

"And there are some who live entirely on salads; but in my opinion, salads are full of water and lead to dropsy."

"Anything else, Mamma?" said Gilbert, opening the door.

Mrs. Anderson clung to the doorpost and peeped round it, looking frail and irresolute. It was hard for her to mention anything outright; it was a breach of diplomacy. She said shamefacedly:

"Who knows if brown bread is better than white?"

"Well, I shall get some brown bread."

"Brown bread — naturally, some people live on nothing but that. As for the Russians, what beautiful teeth! Oh, like pearls! Every tooth in their head sound until they're a hundred, perhaps more. But as for their cooking, it's that of barbarians. And the Rumanians broil bits of raw meat hard over an open fire. No, give me barley soup or some white fish, even a pancake — I can manage that sometimes."

Gilbert said: "Well, I'd better write this down." He made a note. He knew something more was required and waited. There was a silence. Mrs. Anderson crept to the doorsill and coming very close, took hold of his arm and said:

"Supposing anyone comes in in the afternoon — suddenly, unannounced! There's tea — what's that? In China even when you're doing business, people put a cup of tea before you: it's mere custom. Colored water! There should be more. Say, a chocolate cake!"

Having thus expressed her wish, Mrs. Anderson drew back and looked quite cross.

"Why, is anyone coming this afternoon?" he said, knowing that someone must be.

She turned her back and looked sulkily around.

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"Who knows? Who knows? Strangers knock at the door. They say: How are you? Must I turn them away? They say: Don't you remember me? We met twenty years ago, perhaps. Or ten years. I have a head like a cat. And who remembers a child? But men are boys. A chocolate cake is never wrong."

Gilbert said: "Ah-ha! So it's cavaliers now, gigolos at tea time! Valentines!"

Mrs. Anderson turned pink; but she smiled roguishly. "What an idiot!" She pretended to be waspish: "Naturally, here I sit all alone, no one visits, no one knows me. Incognito! Life draws to evening and I must sit like a mouse in a hole."

Gilbert laughed outright: "Don't try your tricks on me, Mamma! Tell me the name of the man."

She half turned: "Go on, go! I must put the dishes together. A person lives with you three years and never brings you as much as — " she showed the tip of her little finger, "that of a cake. No thought, no heart. Another person who scarcely knows you at all calls upon you and brings you an iced cake with cherries on top. I call that good manners. Manners are born, not taught: they come from the heart. To be kind to the old is a sign of good character. We have nothing to offer; so if they love us, we are grateful!"

Gilbert cried out: "Theodore! My cousin Theodore is coming."

She said: "Theo! Pooh! You know nothing — a grown-up child."

Suddenly she cackled angrily: "Theo! He spent three years in my house and never thought of bringing home so much as that — of sausage, not a solitary piece of chicken, not an egg."

"But he paid us rent," said Gilbert.

Gilbert became enthusiastic. Theodore, his cousin from Germany, had knocked at the door when Gilbert was fifteen and Theodore about twenty-eight:

"I'm your cousin Theodore from Hamburg."

Gilbert reminded his mother of this. She now said:

"Yes, it could have been a highway robber; I come back and there I find a man in my house."

"But it was Theodore."

"It could have been Al Capone — a gangster! At five you had more sense than at fifteen."

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Theodore had studied medicine, qualified, become a sailor, sailed in the merchant marine for three years, skipped ship on the New York docks. He had nothing but the address of an aunt he had never seen, Aunt Mollie Anderson. Mrs. Anderson said now, looking angrily at Gilbert:

"You would believe any story. You work in Wall Street. Where did it get you? You should get a degree."

Gilbert chuckled: "They don't give you degrees in Wall Street."

Theo had found a job as a laborer and lodged with them for three years paying rent; a quiet steady man who read books and went to bed at ten.

"And then he got married suddenly to an *Italienische*, without telling me and without inviting me," said Mrs. Anderson.

They had a few words about Theodore, Mrs. Anderson getting sourer and sourer.

Gilbert said: "Well, I want to see old Theodore. I like him. He's sedate but he's honest."

"Honest! What do you know? Your tongue wags but you say nothing. It's George who's coming."

"How do you know?"

"He appeared."

"When?"

"Mm-mm! Such good manners!"

"When, Mamma?"

"He paid me a visit about a week ago. I don't know. He had to hurry away — he had business."

Gilbert went to do the shopping. When he returned, he talked about the family. He also wanted to see his cousin George. George and Theodore were the sons of a dead brother of Mrs. Anderson, a man full of promise, a man of genius, she said, who died early in life. He was too modest, said Mrs. Anderson. It was only after his death that they found in his desk his gold medals for law and philosophy. He was not one to boast. Mrs. Anderson's family was medal-bespangled.

"Mother always calls him Emil, the Genius, the Soul of Honor," said Gilbert to his wife, at table.

"They talk most who know least," said Mrs. Anderson.

Gilbert continued: "And then we have Heinrich the Angel,

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and Herr Doktor, the Professor, my father; but you will never hear Mother mention Moritz der Zwerg, yet Maurice the Dwarf was the brightest of all. He turned Catholic, took his wife's name and taught philosophy in France. The name of Maurice the Dwarf is never mentioned by us. He was as small as Mamma; he barely scraped five feet. And there was Aunt Thekla who wrote romances for servant girls."

"Pfui! Trash!" said Mrs. Anderson: "but a so rich woman, never mind."

After lunch, the table was laid with an embroidered cloth, the tea things were set out; the chocolate cake put in the center. George, when he had "appeared" the week before, had brought an iced cake with cherries on top, which the two of them had eaten. Now it was right to reciprocate, mere good manners.

"It is a nice cake," said the old woman: "yes, very nice, chocolate is good. Of course, there are no cherries, but never mind; it is nice as it is. Imagine, so poor! He had no coat, only a shirt with no tie."

"And he had been in Holland," said Gilbert.

"Holland! What nonsense!" she cried angrily.

"Not in Wetstraat?"

"Tt, tt! Never mind. Who knows? People don't talk. I ask no questions."

They lived on the ground floor, right on the lobby. Beyond their front door, which was up two steps, was a considerable space, with two lifts, one near them and one near the front door, the doorman's desk, palms in tubs and in the middle a staircase. Immediately to the left of the building was a park built on a cliff face and descending into Harlem. George came in a jacket, a tieless shirt, cotton trousers, and sandshoes, a middle-sized man with a harassed boy-face. He carried a big unframed painting. He rushed past Gilbert, who opened the door, hurried along the L-shaped passage, looking into the rooms, found a bedroom to the left, ran in, opened a cupboard door and placed the painting inside. Meanwhile, they stood in the passage with welcoming smiles, dodging as he ran past them. He came out of the bedroom saying:

"It's a painting someone gave me to sell. It'll be safe here. I've

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just been put out of my room and the weather's so tricky I can't take it with me. Tonight I'll have to sleep in the park."

Mrs. Anderson grasped his hands, reached up to kiss his cheeks, hastily begging for details.

"Are you so poor, Georgie, you can't pay your rent?"

Gilbert said in a jolly tone that it was all right, he need not worry, the painting could stay there "till the cows come home." Where did he intend to sell it? George had had an offer; he expected to get $10,000 for it. But he must lie low for a couple of days. The police were after him on account of his rent. Then, unluckily, the room in which he had spent only a week, had before that been rented to a sneak thief. The police had mistaken him for the thief. He had had to make a getaway over the roofs.

"Over the roof, George!" said Mrs. Anderson with anxiety. She looked him over; no bruise, no broken limb. "But couldn't you explain who you were? You have papers!"

"Get beat up first, explain afterwards," said George, walking in to the table, which he could see through the glass doors. George sat at one end of the table, his legs stretched out, talking in an undertone to his aunt, who hung over him, her little white head and her big black eyes nodding at him. He was tired and hungry; he seemed exhausted. But he ate and drank with excellent manners and only glanced once or twice at the chocolate cake before he was asked to have some. Then he took four slices, as they were pressed on him. He was polite to everyone, yet in an absence, like a sick person. He suddenly said:

"You don't know what trouble I'm in, Aunt."

He had not eaten properly for a long time, had nowhere to sleep, no clothes. He could come back here and spend the night on a divan in the living room; and he would be no bother. Then he seemed anxious to leave. She lifted her hands high, pressed back the loose hair, straightened his collar.

They stood at the door. George left them in a curious way. He opened the lift door, next to them, and went up in the lift. Perhaps he had a friend in the building. They shut the door. A little while later the doorbell rang and there stood a policeman to ask if a Mr. Joe Miller was there. Did they know him, a young man with dark hair selling men's shirts? At that moment another policeman entered

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the building and seeing his mate in conversation, approached. Behind him, a young man's quick slight figure, carrying a valise, slipped down from the stairway and hurried into the street, turning towards the park.

"He is somewhere in the building," said the policeman.

Gilbert, full of friendly, lively denials, left the policeman with the doorman at the desk. He closed the door.

Back in the dining room Mrs. Anderson was weeping. Oh, the troubles of poor young men with nowhere to go! At the same time it was evident that she was very nervous. George had seemed so worried. He had brought nothing, so unlike a boy with his manners. Something else worried her — what was it? Gilbert said:

"I think there's something fishy about George with the good manners; I think he's a phony, Mamma."

"Your tongue's wagging like a clapper in a bell and doesn't know what tune it's playing," she cried, darting up and seizing the tea things to carry out. "Such a remark! A poor man with nowhere to sleep — and he's fishy. I gave Theodore a place to sleep for three years; and you, Gilbert — all your life."

"Don't be angry, Mamma."

"And who was that at the door?" she asked hysterically. "Who, at the door? Such a nuisance. Nothing but magazines and vacuum cleaners. We're on the ground floor, never in my life — anyone could walk in. Who ever heard of such a thing? You're old enough to know better."

"It was the police at the door," said Gilbert.

At this Mrs. Anderson froze, grasping the dishes tighter; then set in motion, like a machine, she ran out to the kitchen:

"The police! What nonsense! They call on everyone these days. What a state things are in!"

"The police," repeated Gilbert, who had had time to get upset. "They are looking for a young man selling shirts."

Mrs. Anderson was silent.

George came back at a quarter to twelve at night. He looked worn and tear-stained; but he said confidently that he had been at a business conference and that now he would remain with them for a few days: he had the promise of a room soon.

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They all slept badly on account of the police; and then there were quiet noises in the house. It was Mrs. Anderson "creeping about like a mouse," as she said; and there was a soft light in the hall. George was on the divan in the living room.

Mrs. Anderson was sitting in her best dressing gown, her hair in two tiny plaits, by the bedside of the young man. He was lying on his back with his big dark eyes open and looking upwards. From time to time, he turned his face to her, with an expression of trust and intimacy.

Her hand was lying on the eiderdown pleating it and she said:

"You were right to come to me, darling. Here they are all selfish — in America they have hard hearts. They laugh and enjoy themselves. And it's no use talking to those here about your mother. Least said soonest mended. I realize she could not look after you, a widow. Leave it to me. I'll write to her. But hush! Not a word to them. Here you might as well be in a robbers' den. He and she, he and she; that's all. A bird fell in the courtyard, they took it in and fed it, but it died. They threw it out with the rubbish, a living creature that had died. They will do the same to me. They will throw you out if they know. Not a word, you hear!"

The young man, turning his thin face to her said very low:

"Aunt Mollie, I knew I could come to you. The trouble is nowadays people simply don't believe anything and don't want to help. And then, about mother. . . ."

"Sh! Walls have ears. They ask questions in this house. No one is safe. You are safe with me. I am penniless. I haven't a bank roll sewn in my drawers, as you might think;" here she laughed: "but if anything comes my way, if I can save or get from them — never mind, I'll give it to you for her, my sister-in-law Polly. I know you, you would never beg. You stay here, darling, and never mind what is said. I'll give you some money — a little bit, no more than chicken feed, for what have I? Selfish is the world, my poor boy. Stay with me. I'm alone, you see. And there's room: it's as big as a palace."

She learned over and kissed him. He put both hands on her ears and drew her head down:

"Dear Aunt! I was right to come to you."

She whispered: "Sleep now! Stay here and don't go out till evening. There was a giant on the esplanade, a policeman, a giant,

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when I went out. Giants to frighten people! I'll say you're ill, have a fever."

The next day he was querulous and feverish. He said:

"Don't answer the doorbell. I have a terrible headache, I'm feverish. I'm worried. I can't trust my business partner."

After dark, he went out and returned with a valise. He brought the valise into the dining room and opened it on the table. He said to Gilbert:

"A friend of mine got a lot of shirts, very cheap, a bargain, from the warehouse, no middleman: do you want any? I can let you have them at two-fifty, but it's for quick sale. Look at the material."

Mrs. Anderson laughed with pride and joy, drooped when Gilbert refused. She ran to show him a shirt, so well made, such a good design, modern. He had paid five dollars for the last one and you could sift peas through it.

Gilbert calmly shut the valise, picked it up and put it into one of the large unused cupboards in the old kitchen.

She was shocked: "Such a shame not to help and the boy shows enterprise; he is trying to get money to open a men's store, all the latest for men, on Broadway."

The young man went out on business very early the next day and when he was gone, Gilbert told her about the shirts:

"They're hot, Mamma!"

She believed him; she was terrified. But when Gilbert came back from work on Monday, in the afternoon, two were in the kitchen, the gratified old aunt and the yarn-spinning youth, cutting into an iced cake with cherries on top, which he had provided.

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Jane Mayhall

THE ENEMY

When I first met him, he looked like a handsome, red-haired snake. But no, I will go back. . . .

When I read his first published story, which had already created a sensation, I was struck by nothing but its cruelty. But at the time, I felt obliged to keep my trap shut. "Just think of it, how daring!" somebody said. Or words to that effect. We were at a New York party. "A Jew, writing antisemitic literature." A girl across the room gave an unexplained giggle. My stomach turned. It was 1947. Just the right year, just the right timing. And by god, I thought, I'll bet he knows this. I'd never met the young man who had been in the war, I'd no doubt we shared the same dislike for sanctioned killing, and he was making himself famous by hitting the right perversity, which everyone with any ambitions or pretentions to literary fame would catch on to in a moment. It was the next thing to wearing a swastika, with the millions of Jews scarcely buried. How smart, how chic. My stomach turned. But silently, I kept silent. Or, rather, to whom could I speak? Intuitions are the sponge-boats of the unlucky. I was also a writer and — of no importance, unless you think it — a female, and about the same age as my enemy, the Young Famous. He was already famous, and I could sense his being buoyed up by the tides of political disenchantment, and the backwaters of meanness, and (this is harder to say) the natural reaction to the sufferings of the many martyrs.

Because, oh clever enemy, he had pounced on the little fact that not all martyrs are especially saints. He had tracked down the nastiest nifty. So, a man is eligible for dying in a gas chamber? Well, look, he's not so great. He cheats his partner, he scratches his tail, he urinates in the bathroom. Methodically the young Author brought out the hilarious facts. And shamelessly, he "uncovered mounds of maggots." Brave? No, shameless. But the world wanted to be shameless. Who was their best example? Well, that man of simple tastes.

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Adolph Hitler, himself. What better literary flavor than to extol the one you opposed? But you do it on the sly, by ironic indirection. Almost flirtatiously. And with a touch of the renegade.

An appetite for meat that was mostly gamy.

The devil smiling into cocktails. I became somewhat obsessed. Everything seemed to connect with bad public influences. I remember at a downtown bar, in 1949, overhearing two people (I can't remember what they were like) describing details of a gruesome car accident they'd seen. I can still hear the gloat in their voices, the expressive, complacent enjoyment.

Meanwhile I, this uncredited writer, thought of myself (though I didn't discuss it) as a kind of sour-grapes, pettish and irritated fool. The price of being published only seldom. Either my time was past, or it hadn't come. There was no easy way to assess it. At parties, at least one person would bring up our scandalous Author. Everyone said: "He writes that way because (1) he had an unhappy childhood, (2) he is telling the truth, (3) he's a smooth operator." But even the last was uttered in tones of respect. And oh — believe me, said the fools (then, I perceived I was *not* a fool) "sadism can never be dull."

The years went crashingly by. Can I say anything, without relating it to the whole of society? Here are some random quotes from my 1956 notebook: "The attempt to combat old horror seems to exist in the creation of new horrors. There is some ghastly, mental form of justification going on. The idealization of monstrous behavior. In some ways I understand it. In other ways, I feel it is all superficial and crazy." And later, "They are talking of antiart and novelty. And likewise, the use of criminal ideas for intellectual rejuvenation. Why does this concept seem so bourgeois to me? The tabloids are cashing in, and the scream-titled movies. Some smart cookie knows the cash value of something."

I felt warped and consumed, spinning out more impossible sentences. There was scarcely a movement of thought that didn't fall into a vast, unhappy web. But I couldn't quite fix the source of my resentment.

"The sneer, the mock and the fart, as good as gold in the bank."

And, "It isn't barbarism that is being preached us, but another kind of slick, canny use of decay."

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I looked at these words, almost blindly. Because even as I had written them, for the least read story, in the least read book, I could see how hollow-sounding, even precious they seemed. Behind my frontal lobes, there was always that shadowy companion. My adversary was turning out "good dramatic situations" like cream. And he had a formula, I noticed. It was in pretending, at the beginning of a novel, to like people, his girl, his little brother, his mother — then showing (without comment) how rotten they really were. Except, his beliefs about being rotten weren't exactly mine. In one of his stories, the fiancée of the hero accidentally drops an unused Kotex on the floor. It's a high point of exposé, showing how comic and unlovely women actually are. The hero is rightfully repelled, and in time escapes the girl. But not before giving her a sermon on how much more he loves her than she does him. Literarily, the scene was a "breakthrough." "With all the laughs and zingy guts" (said a critic) "of life itself."

Should some arch female writer have written: "Love the girl, love her Kotex"?

But, inverse Victorianism. And what the hell did the closet equipment matter. If she'd dropped an aluminum pan, would it have made any difference? The guy didn't want her anyway. But good god, and god, again. The idea of a "breakthrough," and so shabby, infantile. And the audience on its knees, picking up the salacious tidbits. Stupid children.

I was once more in the intolerable web. It was like a private *cause célèbre*. I comforted myself by reading Lermontov, who said: "In decent company as in a decent book open abuse cannot occur." But, the remonstrance, oddly enough, I felt was directed at myself. Never mind that all the successful and published villains were doing dirt on life, exaggerating and de-emphasizing, using the mores of the crowd, prejudices and ugly appetites, never mind the spurious images, and the evil they committed, they did it with an art. In them, there was some myth-making ability, and the use of hidden weapons. While I, for whatever I was, wanted to straightly cry out my stern, subjective abuse.

Finally, I met him at a Writers' Colony. It was just outside Philadelphia, one of those short-lived enterprises on somebody's converted farm. I remember the day and fine weather; between the

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silver birch leaves was a dancing play of wind. Down the hill, he came sauntering. He walked, I thought, like a man who wore silken underwear. Some of my bias seemed confirmed.

He was courteous and oily, a snake of remarkable attraction. I mustn't be rude, I said to myself. And not a coward, either. I was not a coward, but I was amazed at the pressure of bona fide world opinion; all of those volumes selling. Books translated into Italian, French, Danish, Japanese. For some reason, all that notoriety and power seemed housed in his gleaming white teeth. Correlations melded; his eyes, like the eyes of some red-haired people, were entrancingly pale, deep set. But, it was the insidious *savoir faire* — that made me feel abashed. How can you attack a villain, whose every nuance is embedded in a kind of intellectual foam rubber, the wisecrack, sarcasm, evasion?

A smiling snake, with a murderous tooth.

I was, I knew, taking the whole thing too seriously. We spoke a few words and separated, continuing our opposite paths. He hadn't been a snob, nor had I expected him to be. I went back to my room and got ready for dinner. On the second floor of main quarters, I had a little niche. Through the dark, shaded windows the light was summery, soft. This was a particular Writers' Colony, and I mourn that it's now defunct. Only a few months since, the chief donor (an heir to a cough medicine fortune) ran out of funds. But while it lasted, the going was good; and for me, more than an economic convenience. It was like a sort of European farm monastery, and I thrived on it. Time, and conditions for work. I presumed that, in the same way, it served as a like retreat for my free-to-choose Author. Else, why was he there? We were buddies in the stew together. But, that wasn't my real thought.

I was slightly amused at the process. How your mind gets stuck on a symbol and won't let go. But that's what life is about, isn't it? Whether you admit it or not, you're opposed to some things and in favor of others; interpretings follow. And hence. All of my fantastic moral resentment seemed geared to a central figure. It was nonsense, but it was natural. I poured myself a half-tumbler of bourbon, and sat down in a chair to think, thoughts galloping like waves across the sea.

I couldn't help but believe that writers, and everyday people

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too, *can't* be unconscious of the effects of what they do. Nabokov says art is not prophetic. A beautiful idea, but maybe not so true? The damage of consequences. If, writing a book, or even in your personal life, you set up a mouth-smacking scene of violence, or some imbecilic cruel character evaluation, some weak-minded persons, or young ones, will want to imitate the orgy. With my Famous Author — a joke, the word "my," but so linked was he to the stresses in my brain — under all the clear documentary sentences (though I'd always fancied strains of a pornographic Somerset Maugham), behind all the furniture of the ordinary, kids eating popcorn, couples having sexual intercourse, old men spitting in the gutter, there was always that little germ of *demeaning*, and the secret in his wheat. The germ, and the worm; and the inviolate snake. Call it anything you want, the message was hate. His hero hated Jews. He also hated sex, but of course in the guise of the funny-ugly, all those side-splittingly awkward positions. The coitus of contempt, my dear, my dear!

I got up, thoughts running acid. In the four corners of the room there was nothing to counter my dreams. But damn it, they were true. No less substantial than guns and chairs, people's lousy attitudes.

But why important to me?

"Cultivate your own damned garden."

In the silence of the room, I'd heard my voice. Me, myself and the bourbon. How Jesus Christ embarrassing. The room, off to itself; I was sure nobody'd heard. No matter, but incriminating. A blind for doing nothing, spouting mottos at the ceiling! All such inanities I condemn. Starved hopes, and muddy illusions. I went to the bureau and combed my hair.

But, the only thing in his books (a final recap, so often had I been through this mad excursion), the only things he'd ever made slightly pleasant, in the art of subliminal discourse, pleasant *and* comely, I thought, were: good-looking clothes, rich homes and automobiles. . . .

I arrived at the downstairs dining room, with a spent conscience. Literally, my animus was burned up. How to waste your own private time. The big plank table where we ate was all filled, with one seat at the very end; which I took. My Enemy sat across, looking

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humble. He had a trick a lot of writers have, I think I have it myself, of disappearing into the woodwork. The rest of the company was acting agreeable; the rough-coated animal world. How inflections do deceive. How much of what I say could be termed avoiding issues, when it's capillary rage sieved off from a wound.

But momentarily I had distance. And the assemblage that night seemed cheerful. Conversation flowed in little groups. A buff-colored hurricane lamp had been brought in to light the table; and down with writers' gloom. And more, to that whiff of rustic elegance, of pewter bowls and Liberty Bell glass, to the unspoken and hibernate calm — had been added the tranquilizing and invisible presence of some offstage person or personages, the lurid angels of success boiling up their magic potions. I don't mean on Broadway, or in Hollywood, but in those far-fetched and philosophical caves of secret cause and reason, where excitement and the ingredients of public taste are savagely stirred and brewed, to whet the majority of emotions, and in what kitchens of the ordinary, that delicious *pot au feu*; and I think that was underneath it, the old conglomerates, and the sense of evil power and the beauties of the system, along with a genuine commonality of the artist's profession, and whatever it was, there were continuous cordial outbursts, dredged-up prolific talk; and the bubble and glow of corresponding interests.

Meanwhile, our prime Celebrity sat, eating his food in that abject, gentleman's silence.

I don't know how the conversation started. A middle-aged Yale poet I will call O'Leary, seated at the elbow of the Author, was attempting a compliment. I half-listened and I didn't, such things travel by osmosis. I knew the poet, who looked like a rosy-cheeked country parson. His work was dour and trim. But that's neither here nor there. In himself, he was unworldly, good-natured. Mixed with others, he might become something else. But flattery, in this case, was not self-seeking. O'Leary was presuming to fill a gap, bringing up an anecdote to show how famous, practical and witty was the man at his side. The details had been picked up from somewhere, I didn't learn the source.

But it seemed that last month the Author, in deep freeze incognito, had visited a midwest college town. When stepping out of his car, he had been instantly recognized by a young college girl.

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Upon seeing him, she had flipped. "Oh," she said, "aren't you —?" and she gave his name, "and didn't you write —?" To which he acquiesced, she had mentioned his latest novel. "Oh," she said, "I just thought that book was wonderful. I read it seven times. What do you think of that?" The guileless, wide-eyed question. The book's topic had been incest, "an incitement to incest" (to quote a corny blurb). Oh, my rummage brain, in context, *I'd thought* disappointing. A force-feed, heartless vaudeville stunt. But, at least he'd dared to write it, servicing the uninformed. . . . But, what did he think of that? "Seven times!" the Author had answered. "I think you must be crazy. I think you ought to have your head examined."

I conceded as I listened; it was a likeable, cogent story. Only a sour-head could miss that vitality of reply. A frank, honest rebuff. And there were comic overtones. It was like a Freudian Chinese box. The framework "outside the culture" and WHAT the book was about. You could see how he kept it simple, like a kind of obscene Kathleen Norris. I'm not being uncharitable, the counterparts are true. But mostly the virtue worked in how he'd handled the girl. Easing out of the awkward moment, with some friendly character. The hero kind, but firm.

Most of the table reacted with sounds of approbation. It was a sort of harmless in-the-know, and didn't affect anything else. The faces, I noted, were smiling. Only the Author looked uncomfortable. He hadn't peered up. Though the attention was centered on him.

"And so, what was she like?" A woman at the end indulged the question.

I shy at the gratuitous, and thought he would also. Merely — I don't know why. He seemed modest, uncompromising. And hadn't looked up from his plate.

But the eyelashes fluttered slightly. He sent a clear, gray glance. I hadn't noticed before the extent of penetration.

"What was she like — ?" He appeared to ruminate. "Well, I'd say," he brought the words out slowly, "she had hair."

"Hair?" The woman laughed uncertainly. She didn't know how to take it. "But all girls today have hair — ."

He gave a stunning, beautiful smile. His face, incredibly, seemed thinner. At once, my premonitions of the serpent world returned.

"That," he said, "isn't what I mean. She had hair — " he

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implied a little shudder, "she had hair where it usually wouldn't be."

"Oh, come off it. Where?" I heard an unlikely chuckle. It came from a man two plates down. He was a somber "distinguished novelist," a difficult, struggling person whose reputation rested on one "penultimate" work. The lamplight glittered on his thick eyeglasses.

The Author made a gesture. He had put down knife and fork, and was running his hands up and down his own coat sleeves. It was terribly grotesque and funny. His voice was rich with teasing.

"Arms, — " he said, and the underground torrents held back by the greatest effort. He pulled himself together with a sort of wicked humor, strangely mingled like a sound of joking vomit. "Uh-uh-ar-rms!"

"Arms?" The woman at the end of the table gave way. Her control was lost in giggles. "B-but, there's nothing wrong with —" she couldn't keep from laughing, " — nothing wrong with th-that."

"Oh," his voice was rapier steady. "You don't *know*. Have you ever seen an unwashed beagle? Each spike of spikey hair — " he bit the sibilance. "Then — you *know*. Like, kind of bunched-up, r-ruffled — "

Laughter swept the table.

"But with her," he said, "that's just the way it grew!"

O'Leary began to chortle. His face had turned beet red.

"You're — " he sought the compliant word, "you're kidding!"

The Author shook his head, mysterious, negative. He delivered another smile. I don't know how to describe it, that species of erudition. He had a quality of lasciviousness and disgust that went straight to the nerve roots. I am not exaggerating. But meanwhile, oddly, too, there was something honorable. That pale, tender glance, unused to vulgar nonsense. Though he was doing the finger-act again, running hands up and down his arms.

Which produced bolts of tinny laughter. Hysterical, not pleasant? Maybe I'm mistaken. The more unfolding the others became, the more I closed my shell.

"I remember — " he sat back with a look of confidence. No, he really seemed boyish and trusting. Or, rather like a blond cowboy; at the age of forty-seven, he had a lanky, young man's build, and must keep himself (I thought) well-exercised. "I remember," he said, "the girls when I went to school. You know? Like in the fifth

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grade. Wow, and some of them — my god! The hairy wonders."

Sophomoric, weird and strange. Could it have happened anywhere else? I suppose so, the group impulse; just enough and not too much. A few others had started to talk, gaiety presiding. He'd set a terrific precedent, and examples stood out and always followed the given theme. Nobody really meant it, and all just acting silly. From the wells of memory, some hair-encrusted female. O'Leary came up with a sudden Gaelic backlog, including a "loathsome Irish lass" with hair from knees to thighs. The table screamed and snickered, and nearly applauded. Meantime, the Author was laughing behind his half-cupped palm. I didn't know how he did it. But I perceived the chameleon flashes. It was very close to successful writing. The strangling of reality for the fine, twisted phrase. . . .

Saying a thing, not because it's true, but for the attention it brings.

Sometimes it isn't possible to record adult behavior. People just get carried away. And the preposterous as it happens, to them, seems ordinary. Afterwards, nobody thinks anything irrational occurred. Though what was being said was really nuts. I couldn't share their fun. It all seemed false and wrong. Still, mundane comparisons took over. I had no stake in the game. I was, in fact, reasonably non-hirsute (as "hairless as an Allegheny cockroach," my mind went flailing out on purging clauses) and what the hell difference did it make?

I, too, like the Author, remembered girls at school. They were Irish, German, Italian. I grew up in an industrial city. As far as malicious commentary goes, what does it ever matter? Some of the girls I used to know had hair on arms, *and they weren't obnoxious.* They were young, nice human persons. But, I couldn't say this out loud. Nor, of the mind traversed to other connecting planes. I remembered a boy I was in love with once (we must have all been about fourteen) — I accidentally saw him caress another girl's skin. She was Irish, and had long black lashes; her eyes were a green-type blue. And the dark down of her arms — was to him alluring. Could such facts be exposed at this table? Of course, they couldn't. We live in an age of prosecuting sickness. I was jealous, and I saw how he liked her. It killed me, but I did. She was a darling, bright, sexy little kid.

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This is not the digression it seems. It's people who count, and not epidermal wrappings. Momentarily, I had to refer to my own little jungle childhood, to get my brains back on how things *actually had been.*

I wasn't all that calm. My heart was ferociously pounding.

"Listen," I said. "Listen — "

But what was I going to say? I hadn't the remotest idea. My mouth was dry as if I'd been running against a strong wind.

"Listen — " I managed to get his attention.

I craved to be devious, it seemed the only way.

"Listen," I said (with a repose I didn't feel), "the trouble is: none of you have explained enough."

"About what?"

"About — the money."

"*What*?"

"I mean — " I could hear in my voice an insane levity. "I mean, the money you were all talking about when we first sat down."

My Adversary glanced at me, perplexed.

"Money?" His tone was gentle. "But — nobody mentioned money." He glanced around the table. "At least, I don't think anybody did."

I insisted that they had, and wished they'd go on about it.

"Because, what everybody said was all so fascinating!"

As irony, the speech was a flop. But I was under my own compulsion. I didn't know why I was doing it. I didn't, either, feel excessively feline. Just angry, confused and numb. My heart was heavily pounding.

Awhile longer, I continued with the nonsense. A few — I noticed the woman at the very end — O'Leary and some others were eyeing me quizzically. But none seemed prompted to investigate the error. Only my Enemy was accommodating.

"I assure you," he said, "nobody uttered a word. In fact, well — that simply wasn't the subject. Isn't it funny, though, how you got that? When we were talking. . . . I really can't imagine. . . ."

His head tilted down. Puzzlement, good will. I wasn't scored for the childish masquerade. He appeared to believe me. I was struck by the matter-of-factness. There was something about the expression. It was the same enthusiastic candor I'd assumed, a short

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while ago, was a hate-filled bunch of lies. He hadn't meant any harm. You just take what you find. For all I'd blamed, he hadn't *caused* the world. He was no more responsible — than a child in the market place. Who was my Enemy? There are no enemies. Only sloughs of puny wisdom, bad luck. Is it the sentimentality of women, to credit deeds with a motive? I was my own enemy. Shift the integers. "People aren't people, only symptoms." Any trite excuse will do the trick. The fun house of conceit. "I have the conceit of the maladjusted. He has the humility of preferred ideas." But, who was I to think there was a choice? The Author sat across in a pose of innocence. The light, smooth brows lifted in a faint arc.

Later, I walked out through the hall to the back porch. The sky was nearly night. There was a nice moist smell from the grass. I stopped to enjoy it, and to look across the fields. A figure came up behind me. I hadn't expected another encounter; I saw the famous profile clearly. It was, in the half-dark, a rather elongated face, that fashion admires today. In a cigarette ad I've seen, there's a very strong likeness; the fault isn't his. Shadows for eyes, and a longish, oversized head, hair combed to the nape of the neck. The balances make it seem handsome.

"By the way, a word." I heard the familiar voice. The Author addressed me from the far side of the porch. The tone was tactful, friendly. Just keeping the record straight. "It was you," he said, "who mentioned it. Nobody else brought it up." He didn't repeat the word, money.

"Yes," I said. "I was the one who did."

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Mark Mirsky

NOAH'S DAUGHTER

Simone Weil, French Jewess, Catholic convert, twentieth–century sister spirit of the fifteenth-century mystic, Saint Teresa, also a daughter of Zion, argues in notes posthumously published by her admirers that Noah's drunkenness was ecstatic possession, his son Ham, understanding this, a stumbler upon a blessed miracle. In her theology, Ham, father of Egypt (and, contradicting tradition, of Crete and Phoenicia, too) was the bearer of true religion and civilization, a prophet of Christ.

> The knowledge and love of a second divine person, distinct from the powerful creator God, and yet identical with him; of a divine person who was both wisdom and love, who ordered the universe, who taught and guided mankind, who, by his incarnation, united human nature to that of God, and was a Mediator, suffering and redeeming men's souls: that was what the nations had found beneath the branches of the marvellous tree of Ham's daughter–nation. If that constituted the wine with which Noah was intoxicated when Ham saw him drunk and naked, he might well have lost the shame which is the heritage of the sons of Adam.

I am sitting in the winter sunshine of the Plaza Gomilla. Here, a shipload of Jews fleeing Palma de Mallorca were burned at the stake. Winds blew the boat back into the harbor. Inscrutable God, you tease Jacob as a father. We know ourselves to be your children because only from a parent would we suffer such abuse. The world tries to comfort us, advising that we abandon insane bonds, but remembering the favors of our youth, we love You and make excuses.

Simone, the blood seeps up from the cracks in the pavement.

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How many hysterical daughters of Israel have clasped their crucified bodies and begged to dance as the brides of Love?

Simone, I honor your lust. It cannot be refuted. Only, listen, I hear your father's voice.

The second father of the human race, the first lawyer. The Almighty comes to terms, makes a covenant, the rainbow. Man will not be destroyed again. So begins human dignity, a contract, two parties responsible, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all the parties will sign for their children, i.e., this document.

Noah's document anticipates the Jewish people. The deal on Sinai, law, a code. A case.

And what was the covenant of Ham's children, those happy-go-lucky drinkers? Child sacrifice. Their Baal demanded the ecstasy of human flesh. "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire." In that line of Deuteronomy I read the dread of my fathers about marriage as they passed into a land of cannibalism. Bad memories of Isaac's narrow escape. No wonder the crucified body of Christ aroused suspicion, any laceration of the body a tendency, backslide into the maw, human sacrifice.

And Canaan's daughter, Egypt, whom Simone hymns as the Tree of Life. It wasn't only ecstatic possession the Jews were rubbing against on the Nile, it was mass slavery, Osiris-Horus, or whoever the Pharaoh claimed as his impersonation, could impose upon subjects in the name of the state, a form of tyranny that the Führer only flirted with.

Noah, in the Jewish commentaries, is not a saint. "And Noah was pious in his generation," but, says Raschi, the eleventh-century scholar, "What a generation!" Beyond the flood, Noah relaxed, an average life, an occasional spree. The Zohar claims that Noah's drinking caused death to re-enter the world. This seems farfetched even in mystical terms. What is curious about the scene is the very lack of drama, Noah lying naked but stupefied, Ham gaping silently, his brothers walking in backwards, without a word, not looking, covering him. The punishment which comes is not immediate. It lies in the future as if Noah is only an apt doctor predicting where such traits of character will lead. "Cursed be Canaan, a slave of slaves he shall be unto his brethren."

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Ham is not branded, struck with leprosy, driven an outcast over the earth. No, the knowledge itself is a curse because it robs the penis of its dignity, sex of its power; what is implied is that Ham doesn't know that his father's nakedness is entitled to privacy. And so the children of Ham don't respect their penises. They create celibates on the one hand, who have to take refuge in wine when sex is denied them; but much worse, the fools who mutter love, love, love, everyone share everyone else, and it all ends up boring, unsatisfactory and murderous.

If you have no respect for your penis you remain a slave. The sons of Japheth and Shem, who understood the dignity of fatherhood, threw off the attempt of anyone to use their organs and demanded the right to propagate in privacy. They refused to be herded as domestic animals, breeding stock. Ham's children tragically allowed themselves to be misused and they have all disappeared as racial stocks. Where are the ancient Phoenicians, Babylonians, Egyptians? Nasser, big-beaked, Semite, tried to instill the spirit of Shem in his land. The African asserts that black organs will be proud, private in America.

Ham is a symbol for a state of mind, a people that will acquiesce in their own violation. How much of the oral tradition which accompanied the Old Testament and was written down in the Talmud did Simone Weil know? The evolution of Judaism is of a people demanding more and more dignity. The Bible grieves over the craven spirit in the Jews that demands a king to rule over them. It is hostile to buildings, institutions, the Temple is no sooner built than corrupted. Japheth fathered the rugged Indo-European tribes who populated Europe with mutual aid societies of hunters, small manageable kingdoms, chieftainships, democracies. Shem likewise. Ham is the ancestor of the modern totalitarian state, feeding a population of doped slaves on ritual propaganda. Egypt and Babylon were the forerunners of today's ant heaps.

The rule of Ham is the rule of slavery and that's why the Jews had to be hurried out of Egypt, a whole generation with twisted penis killed off, a new one with a vision, love of land, law, respect for the unknown, courage to maintain this in the midst of child-burners, rapists, murderers, brought into the Holy Land.

I remember Simone Weil, her hunger for nakedness:

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> Only a few perfect beings are dead and naked here below, during their earthly life. Saint Francis was one of these. His thoughts were always fixed on the nakedness and poverty of the crucified Christ. Saint John of the Cross was another, for the desired nothing in the world except nakedness of spirit. But if they could bear to be stripped naked, it was because they were drunk with wine; they were drunk with the wine which flows daily on the altar. This wine is the only remedy for the shame which possessed Adam and Eve.

that essential difference between Greek and Hebrew culture. I heard the Talmudist, Rabbi Soloveichik, lecture on this: the Greeks regarding the body as beautiful, unveiling before each other in the nude, parading; but the Hebrews considering it sacred, covering the flesh, like the Holy of Holies, only to be entered with awe, which might explain some of the excesses of the Orthodox, making love to your wife through a hole in the sheet — what mysteries imagined on the other side?

Ah, I am drinking a strong local orange liqueur steeped in rock sugar, making myself drunk after praying thankfulness in Hebrew to the fruit of the tree, trying to enter your world, Simone.

Shame! You hate it, but what can it be but the most powerful of human perfumes, consciousness? What is shame but an exquisite awareness of our bodies, something we suppose unknown to the animal. And where is all your mystical talk originating but in that shame, that need for a spiritual cover to justify the abandon of cannibalism, sex, castration. You could not imitate the Talmudists, who, when the power to overcome shame, the evil urge, toppled them, went to a dark place, in private did the deed of their heart so as not to shame the name of God in public. It is our lot that we cannot live in happiness with consciousness but are swept up with a hunger to do what we understand is cheap, sad, awful. Only a fool fathoms himself.

Simone, you mated with words, concepts, abstractions:

> . . . the God who is other than the supreme Deity and at the same time identical with him, is disguised under a great many names . . . Dionysus, Prometheus, Love, Celestial Aphrodite, Pluto, Cora, Persephone, Minos, Hermes, Apollo, Artemis, the Soul of the World. Another name which was marvellously favoured was Logos, meaning Word or rather Relationship and Mediation.

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a Catholic cabalist, how close you never realized to the line of Jewish mystics, to Abulafia, who scrambled Holy Scripture, free-associating until secrets revealed themselves, ecstatic word-games where you might have found the intoxication with Logos which you attribute to the Greeks and Christ.

But was not your shame the most extreme of all? And is not the vocabulary of those who must posit a spiritual equivalent for the actual body terror of that body? The Rabbis would insist that a man's life be the mark of his philosophy, and despite your talk of universal drunkenness and the bread of a Messiah in which you shared, your death, refusing to eat because of your compatriots in France suffering under the Nazis, was an example of horror, of a vocabulary made actual again through self-mortification. So it was not Noah you imitated with his one drunken lapse but a romantic Christ, suicide, an example.

Such shame you must have had, such sickness. I dread it. And it qualifies your account of Noah, for what is such praise of drunkenness but terror of abstinence? Did not the Nazarite Samson perish of lust? And what did those Pharisees whom you so hate counsel but to recognize that the consciousness of man is bound up with an animal hunger in this human life and one must not be allowed to overwhelm the other.

Simone Weil, Saint Teresa, the daughters of Judaism, maddened, holy, possessed with a lust, secret and furious, girls who burned to look upon their father naked.

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BOOKS

FORSTER'S QUEER NOVEL

MAURICE. By E. M. Forster. Norton. $6.95.

I first read *Maurice* thirty-five years ago, when it was circulated in typescript among Forster's friends. It seemed to me then to be a homosexual tract, sympathetic, but with that kind of thinness, when compared with Forster's other fiction, which appalls the reader of the moralizing stories which Tolstoy wrote late in life, if one approaches them with expectations based on *War and Peace*.

However Forster must have put in a great deal of work on *Maurice* since 1935. It is now a Forster novel with developed characters, ironic descriptions of upper-class English family life, countryside, shrewd observation, uneducated hearts and a vision of civilization based on friendships formed at Cambridge. A certain thinness remains. This is partly due to the homosexual theme being cutlined in such high relief that the characters and descriptions not directly involved in it fall into shadowy background.

The story is that of Maurice, a stolid, unimaginative, handsome young man, seemingly undistinguishable from other hearty undergraduates, discovering that he is congenitally homosexual. In one way, *Maurice* is an *Erziehungsroman:* for the effect of making this discovery about himself is to make Maurice — within the limits of his frustration — loving, imaginative, truthful; and to make him see two English upper-class families — his own and that of Clive Durham, his Cambridge friend — in a sharply satiric light. Behind the special story of Maurice's vocational homosexuality, there is a greater story, which Forster does not develop: that of a rather stupid man forced by circumstances to know himself, who through understanding the difference between himself and others, understands life better. Although there are signs that Maurice might do this, the idea is not sufficiently developed. All he really acquires is a kind of enlightened self-knowingness which he is ready to

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fuse with the self-knowingness of another homosexual. That is something, of course. But the tone of the novel is of homosexual bitchiness towards the heterosexual world (which, of course, provides plenty to be bitchy about).

Maurice — in most ways an ordinary undergraduate — finds himself strangely intrigued by the young aesthetes of Trinity (this is in the year 1912) of whom the leader is Risley (a scarcely disguised portrait of Lytton Strachey). In Risley's rooms, he meets Clive Durham, who plays pianola rolls of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique,* reads to him from the *Paradiso* and makes him read Plato's *Symposium.* Their relationship is based on the admiration of the man of intellect and imagination for the companion who has a body of pure beauty which seems to express the beautiful integrity of his being. One day, in a crowd of other undergraduates, Clive goes up to Maurice and "with eyes that had gone intensely blue," whispers: "I love you." To which Maurice, "shocked to the bottom of his suburban soul," exclaims "Oh rot!" and goes on: "Durham, you're an Englishman. I'm another. Don't talk nonsense. I'm not offended, because I know you don't meant it, but it's the only subject absolutely beyond the limit as you know, it's the worst crime in the calendar. . . ." Clive disappears. Maurice pursues him for another two chapters, at the end of which he has found his real self, and also found Clive! "Maurice ——." As he alighted his name had been called out of dreams. The violence went out of his heart, and a purity that he never imagined dwelt there instead. His friend had called him. He stood for a moment entranced, then the new emotion found him words, and laying his hand very gently upon the pillows he answered "Clive!"

There follow two chapters of extraordinary elation, probably the best in the book, in one of which there is an account of a drive into the country, on motorcycle and sidecar, which gives a feeling of recklessness combined with purity, like a game in which two players cover each other from head to foot with kisses.

This relationship between Clive and Maurice is pure, in that although they stroke and kiss one another, and lie together in deep grass, they do not, technically, "come." This is important because the extraordinary elation and lightheartedness, the happy sense of excitement converged in these two chapters, makes one suspect that Forster's ideal of homosexual love was deeply innocent. Throughout the book, Maurice has a recurring dream in which "Nothing happened. He scarcely saw a face, scarcely heard a voice say 'That is your friend,' and then it was over, having filled him with beauty and taught him tenderness." This is certainly a homosexual fantasy, but it is also a fantasy of the com-

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munion of the saints. The point about such a communion is that its members know and love one another absolutely. The absolute is as it were a leap beyond sexual fusion, because although a homosexual act may seem an assertion of identity between two lovers, it is also an assertion of difference, since people are not identical, only spirits are. On the other hand, given the persecution of homosexuals by the English society of 1912 which Forster describes, the communion between men which excludes women (as Maurice's dream certainly does) may make a relationship in which there is tenderness but no orgasm seem hypocritical, and therefore the homosexual act may seem necessary in order that the lovers may assert their defiance of conventions. At any rate Maurice, looking back on his affair with Clive, holds it against Clive that he only half-offered himself and held back from the complete sexual act.

With that abruptness with which deaths happen sometimes in Forster's novels, Clive, in the course of an illness, and as the result of the attentions of the nurse, "involuntarily" discovers that he is "normal." He marries, and becomes absorbed into the upper-class English milieu which both he and Maurice have, as part of their love, rebelled against. Here Forster is true to life. Where sexual abnormality is bound up with rebellion against the norms of society, then a switch to normality may also mean accepting those norms, even though the change of direction in love may be genuine and the social norms false. Forster depicts the deterioration of Clive convincingly enough. At the same time one feels that he has seized on an easy way of presenting the contrast between the acquired heterosexuality of Clive and the unchanged dedicated homosexuality of Maurice to the advantage of Maurice, since normality is presented entirely in terms of the upper-class English country life of shooting animals and of conservative politics. The really interesting questions of whether, in loving a woman, Clive "betrayed" Maurice, and whether Clive might have become a better person as the result of a change of sexual direction which was inevitable to him, are blurred, because Clive is simply reabsorbed into the class represented by his family and that of his uninteresting wife (who scarcely exists as a character). The issue of a conflict between two different kinds of love is depicted as a choice between detested social respectability among detestable people living in detestable houses and pursuing detestable politics and blood sports, and refusing to accept these values, as Maurice now does refuse, because as a homosexual he feels himself rejected by them. To deal with the matter as a conflict between two different ideas of love, each perhaps to be respected within its own

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psychological context, would have necessitated Forster's having to provide Maurice's wife with the luxury of a personality, something which, in the mood in which he wrote *Maurice,* he was too self-indulgent to do. But his not taking this step makes this a one-dimensional novel. In the terms in which Forster presents his "case history" to us, we willingly give up Clive, because he has been absorbed into "respectability." We continue to side with Maurice because his homosexuality makes him a pariah.

Maurice also suffers desperately in his loneliness, and at the hands of a doctor (who disgustedly sends him away) and of a hypnotist, who fails to "cure" him. The only cure is to accept himself, and to find a lover. He does both, the lover being Alec, a gamekeeper (anticipating Lady Chatterley's rescuer) on Clive's estate. The account of the mutual mistrust between the gamekeeper and Maurice (after their first magical meeting) is pithy, and, on the whole, admirable, especially in the scene when their mutual fears lead to Alec's attempting to blackmail Maurice.

This relationship has more in common with that of Lady Chatterley and Mellors than the mere coincidence of the two gamekeepers. Both affairs exist largely within the context of the love/hate relationship of the English upper class with the workers. It is in fact a relationship in which difference of class almost replaces difference of sex, and thus it seems far more suited to a homosexual than to a heterosexual relationship, in which difference of sex is already provided. As some critics have pointed out, there are strong homosexual overtones in *Lady Chatterley's Lover.* It would be far easier to substitute Maurice for Lady Chatterley in Lawrence's novel, than to insinuate Lady Chatterley into Forster's. In fact Mellors would get on fine with Maurice.

In the admirable "Terminal Note" which Forster, shortly before his death, added (while preparing *Maurice* for publication), he mentions that Lytton Strachey wrote to him "that the relationship (between Maurice and Alec) rested upon curiosity and would only last six weeks." Several critics have murmured "How true!" But it is not necessarily true, for there are two main and distinctly different kinds of homosexual relationships, one of which is based on identity and the other on "otherness." Maurice passes from the attempt to establish a friendship based on identity with Clive (though to Clive, he, Maurice, being essentially a Greek "athlete" and not an "aesthete," is already "other") to a relationship of otherness in which Alec's difference of class (remember we are in the England of 1912) is a mystery substituting for difference of sex. The reader who is interested in the role that substitutions of this kind can play in the lives of homosexuals should look at the auto-

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biography (*My Father and I*) of E. M. Forster's friend, J. R. Ackerley, who although thinking himself to be, like Maurice, forever in search of the "perfect friend" in fact always pursued soldiers, sailors and other working-class young men. He tried really to discover identity (the perfect friend) and difference in the same person: a pursuit in which, though driven to it by his own psychology, he was not intellectually wholly serious, though, failing to find such a friend, he was deeply disappointed.

I mention Ackerley's work only to demonstrate that *Maurice,* while rejecting the world of normality, does not really describe a homosexual world as an alternative. What it describes is the discovery by the hero of his vocation for a friendship which is ideal; and which is then modified when he realizes his own psychological makeup and that the ideal love leads to sex. Maurice and Alec "share" — to use Alec's term for performing sexual acts. This means that the ideal has been transformed into the idyll of a homosexual "marriage." But if this marriage were to have any future, Maurice and Alec would have to accept that there is a world of other homosexuals. This they don't do. Maurice regards Risley and his world as cynical. Nor, of course, can Maurice introduce Alec to Clive's "normal" world. The novel ends, indeed, with a highly enjoyable dressing down of Clive by Maurice, who confronts him in his garden and tells him that he has seduced his gamekeeper in the guest bedroom, much as Ansell at the end of *The Longest Journey* denounces the Pembrokes in their school. The thinness is that although Maurice has justified his love it remains a special and separate department even of his own life, still more of the world, and it does not have room for more than two people.

Stephen Spender

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IN THE HEART OF THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY

THE PROMISEKEEPER. By Charles Newman. Simon & Schuster. $7.95.

Charles Newman's second novel, *The Promisekeeper,* is even more polished and enigmatic than *New Axis,* which was a serenely jarring little work not quite a novel and not quite a group of stories. Like *New Axis,* the new novel is a feat of style, a continuous *performance* on the part of the author — who is mysteriously present throughout, omnipotent and helpless as his protagonist, a man trapped in a deathly comedy. That Newman is always performing is by no means an indication of his being egotistically involved in his fiction; on the contrary, one feels in reading and rereading *The Promisekeeper* that its robust and desperate humor, its stunning dialogue, its deranged settings, are elaborate distractions for both author and sympathetic reader, for we need most of all to keep from going mad. *Look, there is something sufficiently crazy out the window!* — Newman seems to be consoling us. "No transport can be of vehicular note or particular weight when there're so many ways, uh, to round this world."

The novel is both comic and deadly, but not grotesquely comic; it it a comedy of immediate possibility. It is more mysterious than the zoned-off world of, say, Nabokov's *Ada,* mainly because it is American and should be comprehensible. And Newman is much more civilized than Nabokov, who seems not to be drowning, not seriously, in his own fictional worlds, though he has the energy to arrange for the extravagant drownings of others. Newman exhibits some of Nabokov's self-sustaining irony, his sense of the closed, airless, hilariously doomed systems human beings construct for one another. *The Promisekeeper* is advertised as a "tephramancy," "certain profane stoical paradoxes explained," "partitioned with documents and conditioned by imagoes"; that exotic word "tephramancy" has been thoughtfully translated by the blurb writer (who had a rough time of his vocation with this one) as a "divination by means of ashes, esp. from an altar or ruined temple."

Whose ashes? Whose temple? Of the divination we can be reasonably certain: things "seem to die all around" the stoical hero. Noble birds dash themselves against Parking Towers, and die; grasses die; a woman's skull is split open and her brains turn quickly from pink to gray; the hero, Sam Hooper[1], himself suffers a kind of death at the novel's odd conclusion, fortified in his stereo-lounger with appropriate background music for what he assumes will be his murder. (The appropriate music is a tape, "The Sounds of Genius," "great themes ex-

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cised from their often interminable former formal corpi" — i.e., snatches of Mozart, four bars of Vivaldi, a trill of Chopin's, a snippet of "Clair de Lune.")

Sam Hooper[1] (*to be distinguished from Sam Hooper[2], his double,* a famous television personality who is never physically present in the narrative, but who is a constant potential) is the young but not very youthful keeper of promises, very American, very credible, a kind of managerial prodigy whose advancement in his "corporation" is in inverse ratio to his spiritual decline. Sam is an employee of something called Management Concern, which seems to embrace as much of the universe as is predictable. He is entirely unconnected, lonely, undefined. A jaunty nihilist, but a gentleman; a voice, or a babble of voices, we somehow believe. Sam, like the writer of such fiction, is "keeping a promise at all costs," though the nature of the promise is not clear. He becomes inexplicably entangled with the Grassgreen family — the plump, neurotic, sleazy, but rather attractive Odile; her husband Aaron, a photographer-artist; her two children, whom he wants desperately to adopt by the end of the novel. For a while he is fascinated by Odile, and when their affair is comically exposed to her husband Odile attempts suicide by drowning, discovers that the lake has turned to ice too thick to crack beneath her, heads out into a storm, and winds up in a Pumping Station out in the lake. Aaron ascends to Sam's fashionable lakeside apartment, with an instrument of destruction that turns out to be his camera.

Sam's problems, we are told, are commonplace and "of our time": he cannot focus on anything. He is not quite real to himself though he has all his report cards and other boyhood records to study. "As each year he had inched away from the certainties his psychic privileges afforded him, he had begun to wonder if the expensive matched luggage of his training might not have been put on the wrong flight." He drinks too much. He suffers an unaccountable knot in his chest. He is astigmatic, and he can correct this only at the cost of a squinting, lopsided face. His gums bleed at night; his friend and sidekick, his housemaid, turns out to be a man. His mistress, Odile, has lost one of her contact lenses, and is diagnosed as a pseudoschizo, a quite ordinary and banal personality.

Much skillful dialogue, farcical events, indeed the "literary amusements" also promised on the title page, a witheringly intelligent vision, a near-perfect use of words — *The Promisekeeper* makes many promises and keeps most of them, though it remains ultimately mysterious and tantalizing. It is a most difficult work to analyze and to read.

Newman's first novel, *New Axis,* was as unbalancing as *The Prom-*

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isekeeper, though it seemed accessible in the main. The suburb of "New Axis" was its setting, and also its subject, bleak and comically chaotic, though of course circumscribed by civilization like all suburbs. Newman's grateful, ironic style was perfectly matched with the half-dramatic tales he had to tell; and in the end it is the author's voice we remember. The best single thing he has done so far, in my opinion, is a long story called "There Must Be More to Love Than Death," which appeared in the Summer 1971 issue of *The Antioch Review.* It is a small masterpiece, the kind of delicately brutal work we might have wished *Catch–22* to actually have been, "some bodies, words and objects" concerning the disintegration of Airman Second Class George F. Patek, Jr. These works establish Newman as one of our most exciting and unpredictable writers, one with an amazing range of styles and worlds. For Newman, anything is now possible.

Joyce Carol Oates

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WAITING FOR LEFTY

REVOLUTION AS THEATRE. By Robert Brustein. Liveright. Cloth, $5.95; paper, $1.95.

Robert Brustein's general thesis about the "revolution" on and off campus is that the "radical" acts of politics and culture we're so familiar with these days are just that, "acts," self-regarding, self-serving, self-generating theatrics, effective in attracting and holding an audience but not in serving the social and human purposes they invoke. Though he here writes mainly about student protest, virtually no active opposition to the existing order of things is exempted from this charge. Even good causes — and Brustein insists that he too opposes the war, racial injustice and so on — get perverted by the availability of instant publicity, which reduces even sincere reformers to the level of the charlatans and opportunists who compete with them for public attention.

The evident truth in this idea is, however, somewhat larger and more difficult than Brustein allows. Any public action is of course theatrical to some extent, in that it assumes an audience and recognizes that what is "done" has rhetorical as well as efficient force. If you allow for any public expression of collective desires or needs at all, you must attempt a harder discrimination, between good theater and bad, between the acts whose style expresses a serious and hopeful imagination of valuable ends and the acts whose style is merely its own end. But Brustein, for whom all "revolutions" are hideously one, who (on the evidence of this book) doesn't distinguish between LeRoi Jones and James Kunen, between Altamont and Leonard Bernstein's living room, or (in his more recent *New York Times Magazine* piece on "cultural schizophrenia") between Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag and Erich Segal, isn't interested in making such discriminations just now.

Yet even the private resistance he offers as the alternative — "the revolution of character . . . through an act of moral transcendence, human intelligence, and deliberate will" — can't evade the ambiguity of the word "act." As Kenneth Keniston pointed out in a letter to the *Times* which Brustein manfully reprints, Brustein's account of the tense days in New Haven is as much theater as it is accurate reporting. Just as he is a performer in his own description of the riotous Theatre of Ideas symposium on "Theatre or Therapy," playing the role of Serious Academic Critic (" 'We are at the tail end of Romanticism when the

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spectators are on the stage, and the actors are refusing to play roles that are not sufficiently close to their own personalities' ") when everyone else wanted to argue politics or drugs or just do some screaming — so in the moratorium days at Yale he figured, in both the public mind and his own, as the dogged if unloveable man of principle defending academic business as usual.

Brustein tried, he tells us, to resist the "radical" call for suspension of classes, telling a student who interrupted his seminar "There's a reality in here too," snapping back at the Drama School students who wanted a "relevant" redirection of activities for a few days, opposing such redirection in faculty meeting but being voted down, getting a vague but sincere-sounding death threat on the phone, which he took with understandable yet perhaps excessive seriousness, advising Kingman Brewster to close everything up and send the kids home before they got shot, burned or blown up. (Brewster, "haggard and under obvious strain," declined the advice whose wisdom he would doubtless have grasped if he'd been more relaxed.) Toward the end of the volume we hear Brustein, in a "welcoming" speech to the Drama School students the following September, virtually daring them to try to occupy his office, as if his role as Tough Administrator and Professional required them to have such naughty intentions.

This was the part Brustein played, though life betrayed art and ("miraculously") no serious violence occurred at Yale, then or later. But in that great repertory theater in the head worse plays than Brustein's are going on these days — I'm complaining not so much about his self-dramatization as about his failure to give an adequate critical interpretation of the drama enacted.

The material for such interpretation richly exists in the introduction to his book *The Third Theatre* (1969). He had been praising (and overrating, as "art") plays like *Dynamite Tonite, Viet Rock* and *MacBird* because they expressed a mood of protest that wasn't as yet commonplace; but by 1969 he felt compelled to recant, since too many otherwise ordinary people were getting into, and thus spoiling, the act. What was once beautifully locked up in the sanctuary of avant-garde theater had leaked out into the street: "what was once considered special and arcane — the exclusive concern of an alienated argumentative, intensely serious elite — was now open to easy access through television and the popular magazines."

In a sentence like that, with its terrible indifference to the ironies struggling to emerge from its own terms, you have the pathos of a

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"radical" culture unable to transcend the once necessary but now mostly self-honoring negativism of its origins. In 1969 Brustein blamed the devaluation of high radical culture on "a failure of nerve among the middle classes." Their duty is to remain eternally philistine and hostile, so that subversive intellectuality may have something to subvert — Brustein won't entertain the idea that this "failure of nerve" might have something to do with a belated stirring of social and political conscience Out There. "Radical" critics of art and culture, fearful that a conversion of the gentiles is putting them out of business, are at one with that tragicomic tradition of intellectual radicalism in American politics that lives with the continual nightmare that some viable populism will take up and cruden its finely wrought ideas. What are all those spectators, those citizens, those *students,* doing on the stage?

Brustein rightly sees that his enemy is not simply new radical politics or social revolution but the very idea of "popular culture," which is for him a contradiction in terms. And its characteristics of topicality and transience, its accessibility to commercial manipulation, its appeal to simple people as well as complex ones, make popular culture an attractive and comfortable enemy, especially because one can then (as Brustein in effect does in the introduction to *Revolution As Theatre*) line up in opposition with Freud, Lawrence, Newman, Nietzsche, Ibsen and Marx. Once these dramatic polarities are defined, of course, the issues get frozen into the Either/Or logic of the polemical cartoonist. To preserve high culture, and the alienated, argumentative, intensely serious self who preserves it, you cast every radical student and professor in the role of a fool who's busy destroying it, as in Brustein's picture of the anxious professor who, to get his beastly students to like him, lets his hair grow, turns in his hornrims for granny glasses and "stops listening to classical albums and starts to dig the Rolling Stones and Steppenwolf." Judicious pluralists need not apply.

This is hardly the tone and mood in which to assert the values — "disinterest," "objective scholarship," "professionalism" — Brustein means to defend against the theatrics of political, social and cultural revolution (if that's what it is). One wants to object that Freud, Lawrence, Nietzsche and the others were not themselves very "professional" or academic, that our high culture and the political and social styles attached to it (in the universities and elsewhere) came out of revolutionary acts of mind that have not yet been realized as they were meant to be in the lives of men and women, that an exclusionary defense of high culture, with its expression of the curator mentality in all its jeal-

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ous forbiddingness, is the surest, maybe the *only,* way to bring about the destruction of what is really valuable in that culture. I would like to be surer than I now am that Brustein could hear and debate such objections outside the role he's allowed his idea of "revolutionary theater" to assign him.

Thomas R. Edwards

BLIND MOUTHS

WONDERLAND. By Joyce Carol Oates. Vanguard. $7.95.

Wonderland is about a cluster of deeply related things — a cluster that seems to writhe frighteningly from a single source. It is about the spirit's hunger for strength and identity, its consequent need to possess others, its terror of the anonymity of flesh, of the blank nothingness of death. Oates seems uncannily up with all of us, the very young, the middle-aged, the old; and though her three "book" titles sound tritely pretentious — "variations on an american hymn," "the finite passing of an infinite passion," "dreaming america" — she is to my mind one of the most comprehensive and knowing American novelists now writing.

The novel begins with a commonplace instance of American violence — family slaughter. One child, Jesse Harte, escapes his murderous father by leaping through a window. The book ends a little after Jesse, himself a father, prevents his drug-hollowed daughter from jumping from a third-floor window to escape him. "I am not here. There's nobody here," she whispers. "I don't exist and you can't get me." Getting other people, eating them, fattening the spirit so that the flesh, or the dust, can't suck it in — is this our famous American drive? Conversely, emptying oneself out so that no one can get at one — is this the sickness, the childish strategy, of the doped-up young? The book is perturbing. There Joyce Carol Oates is, in the "radical middle," to use Renata Adler's phrase for her generation — a generation that "was forced into the broadest possible America" — desperately inward with an older generation's will to power, sorrowfully inward with a younger generation's hatred of control. To eat others to feed identity, to spew them out to escape it — the book roils with the futile strain of both. *Wonderland* is nihilistic, but only in the midst of the most terrible struggle for life.

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"People should let one another alone!" says Jesse's grandfather. Yes, but he is wizened and mean in his aloneness. Oates's essentially dramatic imagination has terrible hold of the truth — brutally unqualified in her work — that people can neither live with nor do without one another. The epigraphs, from Borges and Yeats, are on the world as phantasmagoria, as wonderland; but Oates has a novelist's empiricism, and her characters keep knocking up against solid objects, above all against the very real resistance of other people to their dreams. Typically, though they keep discovering that they are strangers, her people live too close. Their need for others is so violent that it defeats itself. It is an extreme view and part of her nihilism, but it is also what gives her work its raw grip.

Wonderland is Jesse's story — his long attempt to convince himself that he is "not fated to confusion, chaos." Once he starts running from his father's shotgun, he never stops, for when he does it will be to the sound of a shot. At times, slowing, he feels the terrible, pure openness of his brain, which belongs to no one. Everything he sees on the run is blurred; life is a dream. But at least he is too harried to discover that he is no one at all, only an anonymous spirit entering his own history.

Jesse is adopted into the gifted Pederson family. The father is a doctor whose diagnoses are divinations. He wants to cure all the world. And how American he is in feeling that his powers and good intentions make it his. He is enormously fat, as if his bloated spirit had ballooned his body. His two badgered, gifted children and his ungifted wife — gross, ravenous eaters all — are also fat, as if to fill the place where his love should have been, or as if to make themselves too huge to go down his greedy throat. There they all sit at the dining table, gobbling, competing with their grinding jaws.

Unreal at first, the Pederson family is finally fascinating, a touching and menacing achievement of the grotesque. The mother and daughter, especially, are remarkable creations. Like almost all the relationships in *them* and *Wonderland,* the Pedersons come breathtakingly alive, share the peculiar intensity of need and hatred, panic and coldness, that helps give this novelist's work its force. Yet there is nothing monotonous in this. Oates's characters live and change, are unstable, unpredictable — compulsion, a felt *fate* of chaos, is the rule.

Jesse is rejected by Dr. Pederson when he helps Mrs. Pederson escape the family. Yet, leaving Lockport, N.Y., he attends medical school in Michigan anyway, to become the second Dr. Pederson, as the fat genius had wished. Or does Jesse become Dr. Cady, a brilliant lecturer at the school? One day, enviously, he sees Cady walking with a

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young woman on the street. His wife? No, his daughter; but Jesse soon makes her *his* wife. Jesse keeps snuggling into others — into "fathers," into what he will someday be — as if to hide from his appalling namelessness, his openness to life. He *wants* to be eaten (after leaving the Pedersons, he even becomes lean). He next attempts to take on the identity of Dr. Perrault, a renowned brain surgeon in Chicago, where Jesse interns. Abrasive and impersonal, Perrault defines personality as "the promise of disease" before confidently dismissing it as an illusion, to Jesse's furtive relief. It is a hellish, unreal strain, after all, to have to be someone, just as it is terrifying to be no one at all: this double truth is the poisonous little spider at the dark bottom of the book. Jesse becomes Perrault's associate, is virtually adopted once more. But later death steals this formidable support away. Jesse has long since turned cold on his flesh-shy, fiercely self-anxious wife; he pursues a certain Reva Denk — charmingly created — then abandons her when she gives in; and finally there is only his favorite daughter Shelley, who, unlike Jesse, does not at all want to be eaten or to identify with a father, and who runs off at fifteen in order to wipe literally everything out of her mind.

The truth is that the plot of *Wonderland,* in any kind of outline one might make, could not accurately convey the content. The book is even less conventionally structured than *them,* which aspired to the supposed formlessness of life; and for a while it seems a lesser book because of it, until its imaginative logic makes itself felt. The strengths of both books are largely independent of sustained suspense. Oates does not so much tell stories or even create a world as dramatize a state of the spirit: that inner scream of anxiety as the avalanche loosens and begins to descend — the crush of poverty and family in *them;* of flesh, other Americans and again of family in *Wonderland.*

Like *them, Wonderland* is a trifle slow in coming alive. But this is perhaps not a fault; a book must get started. If the novel has a major weakness it is that the final section, which suddenly gives us the adolescent Shelley, is underdeveloped. The interest is deflected too much from Jesse himself, who begins to run a little thin. True, one soon becomes as absorbed with Shelley as with any of the other characters — but so much so that one wants to know more about what went wrong in her early life. What has made her so extreme? Still, the tension mounts, Shelley's letters to her father become increasingly hazy, her sweet spirit going strange like the red sun in smog, and when Jesse catches up with her (did Oates need to equip him, portentuously, with a pistol?), there are stunning glimpses of stoned-out,

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sickly-sweet communal life. The fact is that even at its weakest *Wonderland* is enlivening and jarring.

A more limited objection: the conclusion, while powerful, makes one balk. Oates sends a weeping Jesse and his liver-diseased daughter drifting downriver in a boat, merely remarking at the close that a Royal Mounted Police vessel picked the boat up the next morning. After George Eliot's drifting boats can a serious artist risk another? Any why isn't Jesse rushing Shelley to a hospital? Has he broken down, or is he certain, as a doctor, that she will die regardless? Or are we not expected to ask? Yet it is the sort of conclusion that shakes one even as one resists it. It gives a final, summary image of helplessness, of the failure of human relations. It says, without quite saying it, what the book as a whole has demonstrated (as a mallet demonstrates a rap), that not all the will and rude health in the world will prevent the pain of an unfinished identity, will *conclude* anything, protect the rawly exposed spirit or keep those we have stacked against the flood of anonymity, like sandbags at a dam, from being carried away by death, or simply by their difference from us, their need to be themselves. Jesse's "triumph" over his daughter's addict "husband" comes to nothing. Everything he has done comes to nothing. At the end it is as if he had never absorbed anything into himself at all. Hasn't he all along just spilled on like the river?

The supreme attraction, the essential originality of *Wonderland,* as of *them,* is its dramatic unpeeled quality. Everything in it seems loaded, exposed, veined and vulnerable yet opaque, like a skinless plum. The scenes and characters (even the minor figures) are fully there without being contained. They are uncovered rather than delineated, broken into, never packaged. Oates's style, correspondingly, is inventive and continually fresh without being sharp or self-alerting — it is not a stylist's style. Seriously, steadily, it reveals, reveals; it is the perfect medium for her empathic imagination.

What a shame were *Wonderland* to be neglected or resisted because *them* made so recent an impact. In achievement it is more or less the equal of the earlier book, and the two together, like the gifted and enormous Pederson children, are distinct yet related wonders.

Calvin Bedient

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CONTEMPORARY NONSENSE

MRS. NIXON PICNICS IN RAIN FOREST AND THE RAINS FALL

ABIDJAN, IVORY COAST (UPI)—Mrs. Richard M. Nixon spent the last full day of her West African tour on a jungle picnic today with President Félix Houphouët-Boigny and other officials.

"Anyway, it's nice to have rain in a rain forest," Mrs. Nixon told the President as the rain pelted down, cutting short the outing.

After the five-course meal of soup, lobster in pastry shells, saddle of lamb, cheese and coconut pie, the President, his wife and Mrs. Nixon strolled in the floodlit gardens discussing how difficult it was to answer toasts, and the merits of instant versus ground coffee.

(*The New York Times,* January 8, 1972.) Contributed by Gene Chavkin, Jamaica, New York.

FRATERNAL BENEFITS POSSIBLE

The AACI (Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel) is investigating the feasibility of several important new benefits for its members: group life insurance, cemetery benefits, *Bikur Holim* committees, and funeral and *minyan* committees. Depending upon the findings of the investigating committee, it may soon be possible to purchase graves on the Mount of Olives—through the AACI—in installment or full payments.

(*AACI Jerusalem Voice,* August 1971.) Contributed by Mira Reich, Jerusalem, Israel.

BAWDY MICKEY IN LEGAL TRAP

A federal judge Wednesday temporarily halted sales of posters and T-shirts that show Mickey Mouse and his friends as a roistering bunch of bawdy hopheads.

The novelties picture the Walt Disney cartoon characters taking dope, shamelessly indulging their libido and, in words of a Disney lawyer:

"Engaged in everything that is destructive to their worldwide image of innocence."

(*Chicago Sun-Times,* August 26, 1971.)

NINE FIREMEN IN ARSON CASE

HOUSTON (UPI)—Nine volunteer firemen have been charged with starting fires in the southeast sections of the city allegedly to relive their boredom. All nine signed confessions to starting fires dated back to 1968 and one said he set the blazes for "kicks."

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"He liked to see the red light and hear the siren," [said the investigator].
(*Oshkosh Daily Northwestern,* December 11, 1971.) Contributed by Larry Retzack, Saint Charles, Illinois.

ASK THEM YOURSELF
FOR LANA WOOD, actress and sister of Natalie Wood
I understand you're about to be married. Is it your first? How old are you?—W. Smith, Lansing, Mich.
• It's my fourth, and I'm 25. Most divorcees my age in Hollywood have an anti-Establishment philosophy against marriage. Obviously, I don't. Each time I marry, it's a commitment for life.
(*Family Weekly,* December 26, 1971.)

EARTH, AIR, FIRE & WATER: A COLLECTION OF OVER 125 POEMS. Selected and edited by Frances Monson McCullough. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan. 190 pp. $5.95.
Many of the contributors to this anthology of verse for the 20th century are established poets like Whitman, Pound, Levertov, Ginsberg, Lowell, Yevtushenko, Swenson. As many are little known. They write on aspects of modern life; painful and angry poems of protest, candid explorations of personal freedom or despair, vivid impressions of a mod or a scene. Ages 13 up.
(*New York Post,* January 14, 1972.)

WASHINGTON, Sept. 19—The climate of the times—antiwar sentiment, megaton bombs and youthful "go mod" fervor—has forced the United States Army to sanitize one of its most storied and stylized means of dealing death: hand-to-hand combat with a bayonet.

No longer do panting recruits scream "Kill! Kill!" . . . Instead, they are encouraged to yell a less blood-thirsty "Yah! Yah!" and to thrust and cut in a less exact, freestyle manner.

The Army's new training manuals discourage "shouting of indiscreet slogans" and refer to "instinctive" stabs and jabs. Today's drill sergeants tell recruits that the most important thing about the bayonet is that a vigorous shove with it, any vigorous shove, will do the job—in the unlikely event a nuclear age enemy ever gets so close.

"We're trying to keep things modern and in good taste," says Col. W. C. Carter, an Army training specialist at Fort Monroe, Va.
(*The New York Times,* September 20, 1971.) Contributed by Sarah Jane Williams, Greencastle, Indiana.

EDITORS' NOTE: We'd like to remind our readers that they are invited to send in examples of nonsense. A free subscription to PR will be awarded for each contribution used. In case of a tie, single copies will be sent to the latecomers.

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LETTERS

A Correction

Sirs:

In the article of Lucien Goldmann, "Understanding Marcuse" (PR No. 3, 1971, p. 249), there is a statement which reads as follows: "The second important phase (1933-41) in Marcuse's evolution is his membership in the 'Frankfurt School' to which, basically, he still belongs. At that time, it was made up of the three principal figures who continue to represent it today —Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse; along with Walter Benjamin, who died during the war, and Erich Fromm and Leo Lowenthal, who both later left the group."

I wish to state that as little as my friend Herbert Marcuse have I ever "left the group." It is part of my intellectual past, present and future. I believe that Mr. Goldmann confused intellectual with institutional commitments.

Leo Lowenthal

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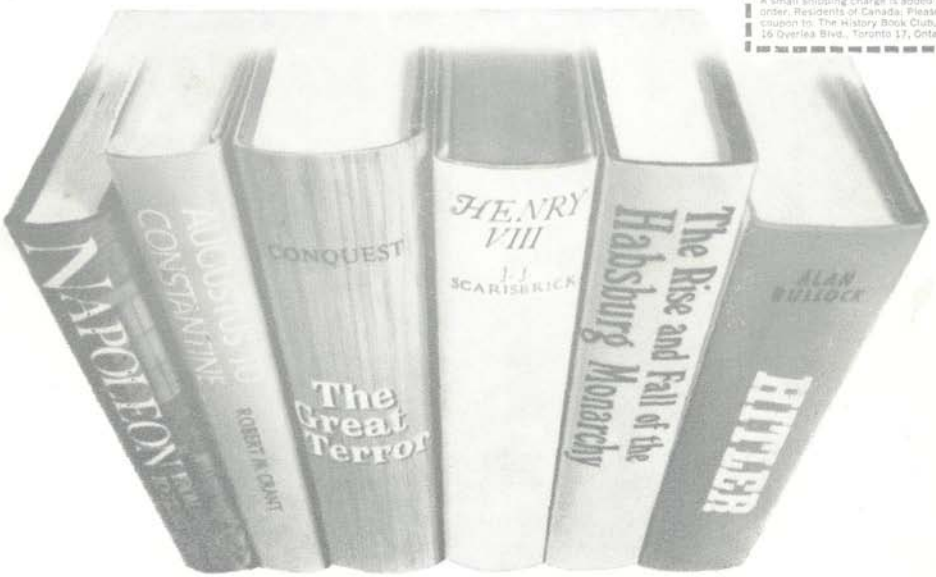

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